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By a Way that They Knew Not.

BY

A. A. WELLINGTON.

"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

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PREFACE.

I have committed this book to the Lord; its success rest with *Him*. If one life is made more helpful, more hopeful, more trustful; if one mother is incited to pray more earnestly for her children, by the perusal of its pages, then I shall have received my recompense.

A. A. W.

By a Way that They Knew Not.

CHAPTER I.

YOU would have pronounced Susie Keith every inch a lady, from her neatly booted foot, to her dainty head, crowned with its wealth of dark-brown hair. She sat in a low rocker by the open window, in her room at Mt. Cella Seminary, bending intently over an open book. Turning occasionally, she let her bright eyes rove over the beautiful landscape,—stretched out like a gigantic panorama in the June sunshine; then she resolutely turned her attention to her lesson, and her face was statue-like in its thoughtful quietness. She was something more than beautiful, this gray-eyed girl, with the grand, sweet gra-

ciousness of a noble woman's soul imprinted on every feature. And nigh to her, about her daily path, had ever been the heavenly influences of love, and truth, and beauty.

Quite unlike Susie Keith, in every respect, was her room-mate, Edna Byford, who nestled up in the broad window-seat of another window. She was the petted darling—or perhaps doll would be the better word—of a wealthy home; an only daughter, indulged, and spoiled, and allowed to have her own sweet way in everything. And, something as a baby mother will dress up her waxen doll, in silks, and ribbons, and fanciful attire, so Mrs. Byford delighted to enhance the almost perfect beauty of her child. Indeed, it seemed sometimes that hardly a thought had she above and beyond, What shall we eat, and drink, and wear? Certainly the text-books that she most studied were instructive of fashion only. Without question, Edna's was a face for any mother to be proud of; it was

also a face for which to pray heaven's protection. But not a thought of prayer for the beautiful girl entrusted to her care, had Mrs. Byford. Ah no! With her, the important question—the thing to be careful for—was, whether pink, or blue, would suit best the delicate complexion, whether high or low neck to her dress would be most becoming, and so on through the endless round of fashionable quibbles. Now you are ready to admit, that, under such circumstances, it would have been quite wonderful if Edna had been anything but vain and superficial.

"I declare, I wish there wasn't such a thing in the world as a book!"

It was Edna who said this, in a tone half petulant, half playful. She tossed back the light rings of hair clustering over her temples, as she spoke, and her eyes wandered longingly out into the surrounding beauty.

Susie smiled, without raising her eyes from her book.

Edna drummed on the window impatiently. "What a provoking old book-worm you are, Susie! I really don't believe you ever get tired of studying."

Susie looked up, still smiling.

"'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.'"

"Oh bother!" returned Edna, quite testily, "for pity's sake, can't you speak, without quoting the Bible? How's your graduating dress made? I'm more interested in that, than I am in this stupid old lesson. What's the use in learning all this fol-de-rol anyway, I should like to know? I never intend to be a school-marm, and who else in the world needs to know all this rubbish?"

At this point Susie expostulated.

"Please do keep quiet, Edna; it's against the rules to talk during study hours."

"Humph!" said Edna, "who cares for the rules? Not I."

Nevertheless, seeing any farther conversa-

tion was out of the question, she betook herself to her own neglected lesson.

Presently a bell sounded through the building, saying to weary students that study hours were over.

"There, I've got it," Susie said gayly, closing her book.

"Well, I'm tired of it, if I haven't got it," said Edna, throwing her book on the table. "Is it against the rule to talk now?"

"No," Susie answered, with a soft little laugh, "I'm ready to talk, or walk, or anything your ladyship feels inclined to do."

Edna puckered up her face into a thoughtful expression.

"Let's see," she said, "I believe I want to see your graduating dress the most of anything just now."

So Susie opened her trunk and brought to view a dress, so exquisite, that Edna exclaimed,

"How perfectly lovely! India mull! And trimmed with *real* lace, too!"

"Do you like it?" questioned Susie.

"Like it! you sly puss, you know it's just too charming for anything. Well, in one more week it will all be over, and then—"

"And then, you and I will be homeward-bound," interrupted Susie, her face all aglow with gladness.

"Is Sycamore a nice place?" questioned Edna.

"*I* think it is, delightful," answered Susie, "maybe you won't like it, though, you are so accustomed to the city."

"Oh, I never stay in the city through the summer!" returned Edna, "the heat and dust are horrid in hot weather."

Now you are prepared to hear that Edna was going home with Susie, for the summer vacation. A strange friendship, it seemed, but those of you who know anything of the close intimacy of boarding-school life, will easily understand it.

"I warn you, beforehand, Susie," said

Edna, "that I'm a *terrible* flirt; so, if you have any *special* gentleman friend, perhaps you had better take good care of him."

Her eyes sparkled with a daring, bewitching light, as she spoke, and Susie looked at her, thinking how charming she was, with her pretty, changeful, coquettish ways, but not a thought had she of what a dangerous rival she might be. Indeed, I think she would almost have scorned to believe that *her* lover, or particular friend, could thus think of Edna Byford.

"I expect Nelson will fall a victim to your charms at the first glance," she answered, laughing.

"When does your brother return?" questioned Edna, demurely.

Susie could hardly repress a smile, as she imagined her grave, thoughtful brother, yielding homage to her thistle-down, thoughtless friend; nevertheless, she answered, gravely:

"We expect him the first of August."

Meantime commencement day—well named commencement day, for on that day ends the old, happy, careless school life, and a new life begins—came, and crowded to excess was the spacious hall with expectant friends and relatives. Presently, to slow, marching music, came the graduates, and fair as two lovely brides looked Susie and Edna, in their snowy dresses. There were a few preliminary exercises, then Susie stepped gracefully forward and delivered the salutatory address, and her clear, distinct words of welcome broke the utter silence of the room.

Following the address, Edna sang. Now it so happened that this was Edna's special gift, —a voice so rich, and rarely beautiful in tone, that her hearers were usually thrown into a transport of delight. Exceedingly proud was Mrs. Byford of this God-given talent, and no pains or expense had been spared to give it the highest cultivation. It was a tender farewell piece that Edna sang on that particular

afternoon, and, exquisitely tender, her voice rolled out every word, distinctly spoken, of the class song—

"Now the time has come for parting:
Classmates, we must say good-bye.
We'll go forth with lofty purpose,
And fulfill it ere we die."

"What's this!" said some one in the crowd. "A prima donna at a boarding-school commencement!"

"I actually pity that girl," said another thoughtful man, looking searchingly at Edna's lovely, flushed face.

"Pity her!" cried the first speaker, "I should rather think of envying her."

"I tell you, her beauty, and talent together, are dangerous weapons in unskilled hands. If she hasn't a praying mother, her feet stand in slippery places."

But other exercises took their attention then; and almost before they were aware of it, the principal was saying a few last words of earnest counsel to the graduates, and then

it was all over. Life was all before them then, —it was the spring of their year, the time of budding promise, of fearless hope. Were they prepared to make the most of the rich possibilities awaiting them? To so live that other lives would be better, and happier, for their living? Ah me! how few realize what a fearfully solemn thing life is, until it is too late, and they stand, clutching in weary, drooping hands, the harvest of a life—nothing but leaves. And yet, how well worth the living is life to those who can say at its close, "I have fought a good fight; I have kept the faith."

But nothing of this thought Edna, as she folded her graduating dress, with its numberless ruffles, and planned out her campaign for the summer.

CHAPTER II.

IT was an inviting picture upon which their eyes rested—that glorious old homestead, bathed in the rare freshness and beauty of a perfect June day.

"'And what is so rare as a day in June?'" said Edna, her eyes taking in all the details.

The house, large and square, with broad vine-wreathed verandas; the lawn, sloping away like a rich velvet carpet of green; and here, there, everywhere, shrubs and flowers scattered in careless profusion, where the bees droned and hummed lazily. The occasional flutter of the leaves, stirred by a passing breath of wind, or perhaps the touch of a wandering butterfly's wings; the twitter of the birds, as they flitted here and there; the sweet incense arising from myriads of unnoticed flowers, smiling up into the clear, blue sky,—all con-

tributed to form a home-like picture, quite new and charming to Edna Byford's city accustomed eyes.

"Here we are, at home," said Susie, as the carriage stopped.

"How delightful!" cried Edna.

Then Susie sped up the steps, to be folded in her mother's arms. There was a moment's forgetfulness of her friend, then she said, eagerly,

"Mother, this is Edna Byford."

Mrs. Keith took Edna's hand, and held it in a close, warm grasp, and made her welcome with a sweet, motherly grace.

After which, the girls went up-stairs to their room, to freshen their travel-stained toilets. And what a perfect bower of beauty this same room was, with its soft, delicate carpet, and rich, massive furniture, softened by curtains of exquisite lace, that swayed idly in the summer wind.

Edna was charmed with everything,—with the perfect beauty of the day, with Susie's

mother, and with Susie's room, where the blossoming elm-boughs were swaying in at the open window. Then the dainty tea, served in the cool, delightful dining-room, where the doors were thrown back, and let in the breath of budding shrubs and blooming flowers, was altogether enchanting. Susie and Edna talked and laughed about the meagre boarding-school fare, and Mrs. Keith smiled at their nonsense, or spoke gently now and then, and studied, meanwhile, her young daughter's friend.

When the repast was ended, they went out on the piazza, and gradually the soft, rose-tinted twilight deepened down around them. Then Susie slipped away to the piano, and the sweet melody of her song floated out from the open windows and lingered all about them, and the beauty and stillness folded them in like a mantle.

The elegance of the Keiths' home was nothing new to Edna Byford. But the genuine comfort, the refined pleasantness, the family

joy, that reigned there, and welcomed her into its midst, were wholly new and strange. She drank in the sunshine and beauty, and the sweet loving-kindness, and Christ-like courtesy, together, and thought of them—if she thought at all—as parts of one another. Still, she had never seen just *such* sunshine and indescribable civility before. She was totally ignorant of the fundamental principle of good-breeding, which teaches us to "Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another."

Meantime, Mrs. Keith, with sweet, motherly grace, and gentle womanliness, held high her gospel-lighted lamp. And the summer days went gayly by; and in due course of time the evening of the weekly prayer-meeting came; and out upon the evening stillness the great bell in the church steeple sent forth its invitation.

Within the church Rev. Dr. Gordon waited the coming of his people—with the least little unacknowledged feeling of discouragement

tugging at his heart-strings. As he waited, he hummed, softly,—

> "I'll cast on Him my every care,
> And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer."

Then the people began to drop in, one by one, pausing in the vestibule to chatter of any and every thing but prayer.

"I just know I shall laugh," said Edna, as they entered the outer door, "I always want to when I'm in church."

Susie looked grave.

"But you mustn't," said she. And then others came in, and they went quietly to their seats.

And presently Edna nudged Susie, and whispered,

"Isn't he handsome?"

Then Dr. Gordon—a man of perhaps thirty, with a grave, thoughtful face, and deep, dark eyes, expressive of fire, and earnestness, and almost infinite tenderness,—arose, and looked around upon the upturned faces. A moment

he paused; then, in a clear, low voice, read their evening lesson, ending with the impressive injunction:—

"'And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.'"

Immediately after the reading, they sang that inspiring old hymn:

"Am I a soldier of the cross,—
A follower of the Lamb,—
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His name?"

Then Dr. Gordon said:—

"Let us pray."

And then, for perhaps the first time in her life, Edna listened to real, heartfelt prayer. Not as if speaking to some far-away, strange being, but simply as a child, tenderly, as a large-souled man would ask some much desired favor of a beloved parent, so Dr. Gordon pleaded the cause of his people. And not a thought of laughing had Edna, as the wonderful words, spoken by the low, earnest, tender voice, penetrated to her inner consciousness.

As for Susie, she could have repeated the entire petition—almost word for word—so deep was the impression it made upon her soul.

After the prayer, the congregation sang:—

"Work, for the night is coming."

At this point Dr. Gordon announced that the remainder of the time would be devoted to testimony, and recommended that every one in the room take part in the exercises. He glanced at Susie as he spoke, and her eyes fell, and the color rose in her face.

"What! stand up before Edna and confess her Lord! Indeed, indeed she couldn't," her thoughts ran.

And Dr. Gordon—with his profound knowledge of human nature—saw and read her indecision, and girlish cowardice, and gladly would he have given to her of his abundant courage.

"Ashamed of Jesus! that dear friend,
On whom my hopes of heaven depend!"

he sang softly.

Susie's lips parted eagerly, then closed again, like one afraid to speak, her breath came quickly, and she trembled from head to foot; nevertheless, she rose to her feet.

"Jesus is my friend, and Savior," she said, timidly.

Then she grew strangely calm, and strong.

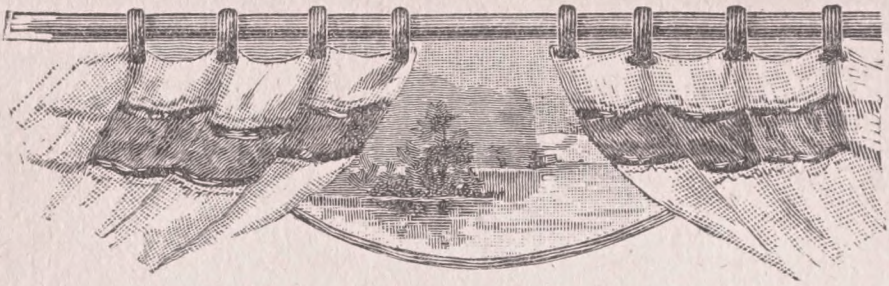
"Thank God," said Dr. Gordon, earnestly.

Then, after a few words of testimony from old and young, he spoke a few solemn, closing words.

"My friends," he said, "if you go forth from this meeting strengthened to do *whatsoever* you do to the glory of God, then your coming has not been in vain. Your allotted task may be hard and distasteful; your daily round, irksome and disagreeable; and you may feel tempted, in utter discouragement, to say, there is *nothing* you *can* do to the glory of God. But the Great Teacher taught that 'a cup of cold water only,' given in the spirit of love, was worthy of reward.

"Christ said, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' And only as you realize this fact, doing whatever you do as unto Him, can you live a broad, beautiful, Christian life. Thus understanding it, the most commonplace action becomes sublime. What matters, then, where your feet stand, or wherewith your hands are busy? You need not say, 'Oh, if I could only do some grand work for Christ!' You have but to 'Lift up your eyes to look on fields white already to harvest, but the laborers are few.' Let none hear you idly saying,

" 'There is nothing I can do,
While the souls of men are dying,
And the Master calls for you:
Take the work He gives you gladly,
Let His work your pleasure be;
Answer quickly, when He calleth,
Here am I, send me, send me.'"



CHAPTER III.

"DR. GORDON, my friend, Miss Byford." It was Susie who said this, a few moments later.

Edna bowed, with that inimitable air of grace, and her great childlike eyes looked up into his,—grave and questioning. She imagined his look said: Miss Byford, are you a Christian? So, from pure contrariness, she said some trifling, nonsensical thing. Then others pressed up to shake hands with their pastor, and they went their separate ways. And home, through the glorious moonlight, walked Dr. Gordon, thinking deeply of his people's welfare. For the young he felt especially anxious, and his grave face brightened when he recalled Susie's modest testimony, realizing, as he did, the

moral courage required to give it, and to himself he said:

"Unless I am very greatly mistaken, she has the elements of a grand, Christian character."

Strangely quiet was Edna during the homeward walk, and Susie's conversation was wholly to herself. It ran something in this way:

"'Whatsoever.' That must mean every little thing. It would be truly lovely to live so, but—would it be possible? Let's see—if I should try—in the first place, mother is very particular about my appearance. She wants my hair combed nicely every morning, before breakfast, and my collar and cuffs, and everything about my dress, exquisitely neat. Now, for my part, I would much rather give my hair a quick brush, than waste the time combing it so nicely, and as for collars and cuffs, I don't see why they are necessary at all. Then, mother says order is heaven's first law, and

she is constantly speaking to me about my disorderly habits. I really don't intend to be careless, but it is so much trouble to stop, when one is in a hurry, to put every little thing in its proper place. But I suppose 'Whatsoever' must mean to please mother in every possible way, and pleasing her means doing all these little homely duties. Why, if I start trying, on that principle, there will be no end to the things I ought to do. But how strange it will seem to think of doing such trivial acts 'in the name of the Lord Jesus.'"

However, before they had reached home, Susie had determined in her resolute little heart to take that one word, "Whatsoever," for her motto. Thankful, indeed, would Dr. Gordon have been could he have seen the earnest purpose, and known that it was born of words of his.

"It's just too ridiculous," Edna said, the minute they were in their room, "the way people go on at a prayer-meeting."

She took the pins from her hair as she spoke, and let it fall, like a rich, golden veil, around her. Then she looked in the glass to see the effect, and curled her frizzes round her finger. It was one of Edna's besetting sins, this admiring herself in the mirror, and—to those who admire pink and white prettiness—the face she saw reflected there was very lovely.

Susie flushed deeply.

"Did you notice anything *very* absurd this evening?" she asked, anxiously, and Satan had the pleasure of disturbing her spirit by the thought that Edna alluded to *her* testimony.

Edna laughed.

"Of course *you* didn't see anything but Dr. Gordon's handsome face," she said, "I shouldn't object to going to prayer-meeting myself, if I was sure of meeting *him* there. But the *idea* of being obliged to sit and hear some horrid old woman say: 'The blood of

Jesus Christ cleanseth me from all sin,' is *too* absurd."

Susie was folding the pillow-shams, and she finished folding them, and laid them neatly in the drawer, before she answered:

"The Bible says, 'He is able to save them to the *uttermost* that come unto God by Him.'"

"Humph!" said Edna contemptuously, "you are welcome to believe such nonsense; for my part, I don't believe one word of it. I think religion is just another name for fanaticism."

Saying which, she shut her lips with a dispute-me-if-you-can expression, gave her hair an energetic twist, and went on with her elaborate preparations for the night.

As for Susie, she drew her Bible to her and turned its leaves a little nervously. She was so unused to religious controversy, that Edna's careless words jarred on her with positive pain. But a wonderful panacea for

nervousness is the Bible, and, though Susie made no effort to read, the touch of its leaves quieted her. And then she was ready for her evening lesson, and she slowly read:

"And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, can not be my disciple."

Just there she paused, to ponder on what it really meant to "come after" Christ. And she almost exclaimed aloud, so startling came the thought to her awakened soul, that it meant nothing more, nor less, from beginning to end, but the sacrifice of *self*. To followers of Him, the glorious leader, there was no promise given of *temporal* joy. He who said, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool," gave only His *peace* to His disciples. To them He said:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

"Must I, then, give up all desire for happiness in this world?" she mused sadly. Then

a rare smile overspread her face as she thought, that, after all, the choice did not rest with *her*. And presently she dropped upon her knees, and laid all the tangles down into the Hand that overrules all things so wisely, and so well. Very sweet was the peace that settled down upon her then, and the head she laid upon her pillow was full of tranquil thoughts.

The next morning, as they stood on the veranda, discussing their plans for the day, a firm, manly step startled them, and they turned quickly to greet Dr. Gordon.

"Oh dear!" Edna said to herself, "I do hope he won't talk religion."

But altogether too earnest was Dr. Gordon to let an opportunity pass without saying some word for his Master.

"Are you ready for work, Miss Keith?" he said presently.

A rare glow spread over her face, but she answered quickly and truthfully:

"Yes."

Dr. Gordon looked kindly into the clear, true eyes, uplifted to his, then he turned and said, pleasantly:

"We are sorely in need of workers, Miss Byford, can't *you* lend us a helping hand?"

Edna laughed.

"Why, Dr. Gordon, *I'm* a *heathen!* she said, lightly.

If she expected him to look shocked, or in any way dismayed at this startling announcement, she was mistaken.

"Ah," he said, quietly, "then I have a message for you. The King commissions me to invite you to a wedding; but he bids me tell you that no guest will be admitted without a wedding-garment."

He smiled pleasantly as he spoke, and Edna was at a loss to know whether he was talking "religion" or not. Nevertheless, she had no ready answer to his words, so he continued:

"Come into my Bible-class next Sunday, and I will tell you all the particulars."

"What do they do in a Bible-class?" she questioned, feeling that she must say something.

"We read the Bible, and study its beautiful lessons," he answered. "Then we sing, and have a good time generally. But come and see for yourself."

There was silence for a moment, and then he easily brought on a conversation of every-day matters; while Edna held a little talk with herself, that ran something in this way:

"His Bible-class! The *idea!* What *would* the girls say to see *me* croning over the Bible?"

Dr. Gordon arose to go.

"I shall expect you next Sunday," said he. And before she really knew it, Edna had promised to go.

Well, Sunday came—a perfect day—and Edna's first waking thought was of the "purple, and fine linen," wherewith she meant to array herself. And not a thought

had she for the solemn command, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

After breakfast she went to her room, and, after a brief discussion with herself, proceeded to lay upon the bed the articles of her toilet. There was a silk, with Worth's matchless style stamped upon it, and creamy laces; gloves, matching the exquisite brown of her dress, and a dainty hat, representing a fabulous sum of money. The little lady's face was aglow with satisfaction as she inspected the elegant display, and she said to herself,

"There, that will give the country people some idea of style."

And the early hours of the pure, sweet Sabbath morning went their way, while her mirror monopolized her thoughts.

As for Susie, like an outgrowth of the pure, sweet day seemed she, as they walked down the quiet street to the church together.

CHAPTER IV.

EDNA settled herself, with all the grace imaginable, in a corner of the pew; looking like a young princess in her elegant attire.

"'What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's,'" said Dr. Gordon.

And Edna listened to the sublime words, toying carelessly with her fan, thinking the while what a commanding oratorical tableau he made; with his erect, graceful figure, his native dignity, his splendid head, and his face all aglow with that inimitable light, heart-holiness gives to even the homeliest features.

In order to illustrate such a theme a speaker

must personally know whereof he speaks. But the doctor was fully equal to the occasion, and garlanded the old, old story with so many flowers of poetry and rhetoric that the entire congregation sat spell-bound from the text to the peroration.

There is something contagious in religious enthusiasm, and Edna forgot her fan, forgot the effect of her dress, as she drank in the majestic sentences.

When the speaker touched upon the doctrine of holiness, and demonstrated how perfectly right and proper it was that a professing Christian's heart and life should be pure and consecrated, her eyes began to dilate with wonder.

Perhaps, if an older, or plainer man had spoken the same truths, she would not have been thus impressed. Be this as it may, this morning, for the first time, she comprehended the grandeur, and beauty, of the Christian religion.

"'Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord,'" Dr. Gordon said. "'For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness, into His marvelous light.'"

Edna listened breathlessly, thrilled through every nerve into an ecstasy of delight, until suddenly her attention was arrested by the sound of a loud whisper, in a childish voice, just behind her.

"Mamma, mamma, isn't that lady's hat pretty?" said the little one.

And back to all the petty vanities came Edna's thoughts. Dr. Gordon was very eloquent; but what was it, after all, to *her?* Of course, to those who believed in the Bible, literally, it was well enough; but the Bible was an old book, written for a different age and people than those of the present day.

So Satan had the pleasure of turning her thoughts aside, and occupying them with her hat, and hair, and dress. And the grand hymn rolled through the church without touching her heart with its solemnity and beauty. Dr. Gordon had sown the seed, and God alone knew whether it would yield sixty or an hundred fold.

"What a grand sermon!" Susie said, as they walked slowly away.

Edna shrugged her shoulders.

"If I believed one-half that Dr. Gordon said this morning, I should turn into a sister of charity, and have done with it," she said, sharply.

A few days later, a letter came from Nelson Keith, announcing his return. By this time, Edna had begun to feel herself in a strange atmosphere, without special gentlemanly attentions; so, greatly delighted was she at the prospect of some one to "flirt" with. What was the use of witching ways, and wonderfully

beautiful toilets, if there were no gentlemen to admire them? Thus she thought, foolish child that she was.

Ah, a blessed thing it is, that the Heavenly Father watches his creatures lovingly, and, knowing the end from the beginning, "leads them in paths that they have not known," to Himself. But let no one imagine that Edna desired to be thus led. No, indeed! To her, the "broad road" was much more delightful, and sweeter far—to her untrained taste—were the husks of gratified vanity, than the rich, satisfying viands on her Father's table. So far, the husks had been sweet, and she had never once thought of the coming time, when the world, and its delusive pleasures, would utterly fail to satisfy her. Perhaps, then, it was not strange that she desired nothing better; and not at all so that she should say to herself:

"I declare, I haven't had any fun since I came here! I *do hope* Susie's brother will not

be like Dr. Gordon. I don't believe *he* knows pink from blue."

But quite mistaken was Edna in this. Dr. Gordon was not blind.

Well, the Keith family were particularly busy during the next few days. Edna inspected her dainty wardrobe with reviving interest, and the important question that she tried to settle was, which of the elegant dresses would best suit the taste of Nelson Keith. No wonder the little lady was puzzled, for the variety was almost endless. There were dresses of mull, and silk, and wool, of every prevailing shade of color, each in its way a marvel of beauty. Now, which of this varied assortment to choose for the day of that gentleman's arrival, was indeed a weighty question. Finally she said, decidedly:

"I suppose he likes white, most gentlemen do, but—the blue is ever so much more becoming; I believe I shall wear the blue."

Then her brow cleared, and she hummed

little scraps of song, as she replaced the dresses in the closet.

"Oh dear! I *do hope* he isn't religious," she said, presently.

But in this she was doomed to disappointment, for Nelson Keith's religion was a part of his very being. Not making him long-faced and sober, beyond his years, but filling his life with a rich, deep, restful joy.

CHAPTER V.

HOME, over the trackless waters, sped Nelson Keith. And the evening of a lovely summer day found him walking the familiar streets of his native village, with a strange feeling of loneliness at first, for his five years' absence had made him almost a stranger to his home. People stared at him with well-bred curiosity, questioning who he was, and where his place of destination.

The elegance of education and travel were visible in the tall, erect, graceful figure, the easy self-possession, the perfectly-fitted clothes—and, perhaps, his mother would look twice before she would recognize her boy in this tall, bearded man, with an air of manliness about his every motion.

He looked very handsome to Susie when she

caught sight of him, moving briskly up the walk.

"There's Nelson!" she exclaimed to Edna, as she sprang forward to meet him.

"This can't be Susie!" he cried, holding her from him. "How you have changed; I should not have known you!" And then he almost smothered her with kisses.

Outside the widely open door Mrs. Keith stood in waiting.

"Nelson, my boy!" she said, and it is impossible to convey to you a tithe of the joy, and tenderness, those brief words of welcome expressed.

Nelson Keith spoke no word, save "Mother!" but his manly lip quivered with repressed emotion, as he folded her close in his strong, young arms.

"Now I must introduce you to Edna," Susie said, presently.

"Edna," he repeated, with just the slightest rising inflection of voice, "have you company?"

"A school friend of Susie's, passing the summer vacation with her," returned Mrs. Keith.

"And I hope your heart is well guarded," laughed Susie, "for Edna is quite irresistible."

"That important fortress is impregnable," he answered, smiling, and every feature of his expressive face spoke of a heart held in firm control.

Then Susie flew away, and presently returned with Edna, looking like a painter's dream of beauty in her dainty suit of delicate blue, and a soft pink flushing her cheek.

"Edna, allow me to introduce to you my brother, Mr. Keith: Nelson, this is my friend, Miss Byford," said Susie.

At that moment the tea-bell sounded, and he gallantly offered Miss Edna his arm.

Perhaps none of them could appreciate what a delight that supper was to Nelson Keith. And certainly the room, arranged with every detail of modern elegance,—the table with its

snowy linen, glittering glass and shining silver,—made an enticing picture for the wanderer's eyes. Then, Edna suited his æsthetic taste, and her cool, charming presence contributed not a little to his pleasure.

"Ah, there's no place like home!" he exclaimed, and his face took a satisfied expression that his mother knew well how to interpret.

Nelson had always been elegant; his father had often said of him, "The boy has an artist's eye for beauty." And his mother, watching her son's expressive face, wondered whether this love of the beautiful would be his good, or evil genius.

"I can appreciate your feelings, Mr. Keith," said Edna, "I shall never forget how pleasant our table at home looked when I returned from boarding-school, nor how much the coarse table linen, and plated silver, annoyed me while there."

"You are *so* fastidious, I don't see how you

endured boarding-school life at all," laughed Susie.

"What can't be cured, *must* be endured," Nelson answered, smiling.

"*I* intend to take the sunny side of life, and leave the *endurance* to those who like it," Edna retorted, pertly.

Nelson Keith favored her with a look, half serious, half amused.

"If the storms of life reach your sunny side, what then?" he said.

"O, I'll invest in a strong umbrella, that will shield me from them," she answered, laughing.

"I know of but *one* safe refuge in time of storm," he said, gravely. "The Bible tells us, 'There shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.' If you have *this* umbrella, Miss Byford, you are safe."

"When the storm comes, it will be time

enough to think about a shelter," she answered, flippantly.

And then they arose from the table, and took their way to the back parlor. Nelson went over to the piano and opened it, saying,—

"You play and sing, Miss Byford?"

"Oh, Edna is a musical prodigy," said Susie, glad to have her friend appreciated.

Edna's face flushed delicately, and she looked up at him with a smile, that seemed sweet and shy. Then she seated herself at the piano, and her white fingers danced over the keys, bringing forth strains of wonderful music. And presently she sang, with touching pathos, that sweet song, "Home Again."

"Now I am going to ask you to sing one of my favorites," Nelson said:

"'Thus far the Lord hath led me on,
Thus far His power prolongs my days;
And every evening shall make known
Some fresh memorial of his grace.'"

The familiar hymn was new to Edna, but her splendid voice burst forth in the grand old

tune, and Nelson Keith's rich bass, mingled with her clear soprano.

There was absolute silence for a moment; then, with the spell of the music still lingering around them, Mrs. Keith asked her son to lead their family devotions. Without a moment's hesitancy he knelt, and, before Edna's thoughts were composed after the singing, they were startled anew by the voice of prayer.

Now, this kneeling in the family circle was a novel experience to Edna. And when Nelson Keith spoke of *her* as "this stranger beneath our roof, who is a stranger to *Thee*, her best friend," she hastily wiped away a falling tear. Very earnest was his voice as he went on: "And now, dear Father, we ask Thee to give her a blessing, suited to her need. We do not need to tell Thee anything about her, for there is not a thought of her mind, or an inclination of her heart, but lo! O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether."

Never before had Edna heard herself spe-

cially prayed for. And startling indeed was the thought, that her very inmost, secret thoughts were open to the All-seeing Eye.

There were pleasant "good-nights," after this; then she went away to her room, and stood by the open window.

"A lovely place I've chosen to pass my vacation, and have a good time!" she said to herself. "Why, there's some one to talk, or sing, or look religion at every corner."

Then she thought how handsome, and thoroughly manly, Nelson Keith appeared, and the contrast between him and the silly exquisites of her set, was anything but flattering to most of the young gentlemen of her acquaintance.

It was not Edna's forte to think very seriously about anything; and never in her life before had she been thrown for so long a time with thoughtful people. So, perhaps it was not strange that she felt tired, and disgusted with everybody in general, and herself in particular.

"It is unutterably stupid," she said, still talking to herself, "and I don't intend to stand it any longer. I'll write to mamma to-night, and tell her to write for me to come home.

So she seated herself, and wrote thus:

DEAR MAMMA:

I know you will laugh at me when I tell you that I want to come home. But, I have heard more preaching, and praying, since I came here, than I ever heard in my life before, and I am heartily tired of it.

Susie, and indeed the whole family, are just splendid, and I wouldn't have them know for the world why I am leaving. So, mamma dear, I want you to write some urgent reason why I should start for home.

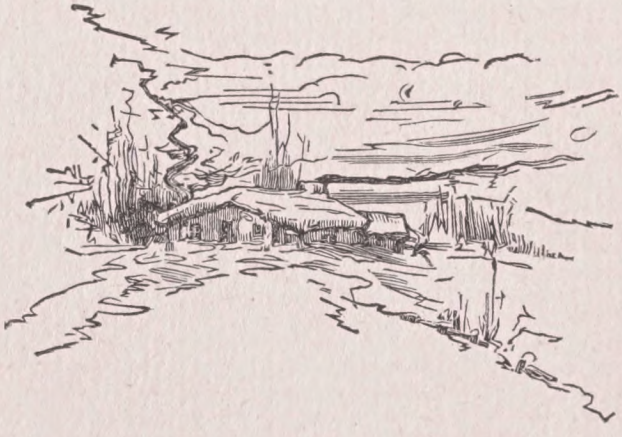
With love, and kisses,

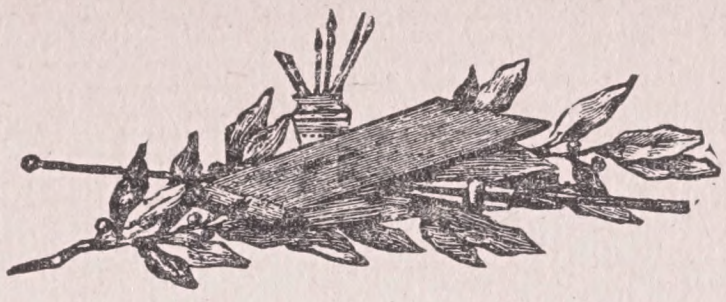
EDNA.

She folded and addressed her letter, with a satisfied smile. And, unconsciously humming the tune she had just sung with Nelson Keith, she began to prepare for rest, and presently she laid her head on her pillow.

But sleep did not come for the asking, and she tossed about uneasily until, overcome by fatigue, she dropped into a restless slumber.

And then, she dreamed that she was out in mid-ocean, in a tiny boat. The great waves threatened to engulf her, when suddenly the tall form of Nelson Keith rose from the raging waters. He grasped the trembling boat with a firm, strong hold, as he said, calmly, "Be still; I will save you."





CHAPTER VI.

ALL the while she was dressing, she thought of her dream, and a little shudder ran through her as she lived over again the terror of the night.

"I declare, I'm getting nervous!" she exclaimed, petulantly. "And no wonder, listening to nothing but preaching, from morning till night. One thing is certain, I'm going home, and it will be one long while before I listen to another sermon."

While she was talking, she arranged every fold, and ruffle, of her elaborate morning dress, with more than usual care. And when the breakfast bell rang, she cleared her face, gave a parting look in the glass, and a moment later presented a smiling face at the breakfast table.

After breakfast, she wandered away by herself into the conservatory. And there Nelson found her, apparently absorbed in admiring a beautiful calla lily. He severed the stately blossom from its stem, and handed it to her, saying:

"You remember who said, 'Behold the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.'"

How could she give a quick retort to words like those? And again she stood silent before him, looking down at the waxen purity of the flower she held in her hand.

"It is simply perfect," she said, at last.

"It is so in Nature's works always," he answered. "From this stately lily, to the smallest field-flower, there are no rough edges, no unfinished pieces. Every tiny leaf fits into its allotted place, with a niceness of finish no hand but the Almighty hand can give. Look

at this pansy; see the royal purple shading away to faintest tint of yellow; an artist might waste a lifetime, before he could design a thing so perfect."

She looked up into his earnest, manly face, with a bewildered look of surprise. And he added, gently:—

"While looking at Nature's works, it seems natural to think of Nature's God. While looking at the gift, it seems impossible to forget the giver."

Now, extremely disgusted as Miss Edna was with sermonizing, there was something in Nelson Keith's low, serious voice, and grave, kind manner, that moved her in spite of herself. She tried to make a careless answer; then, moved by a sudden impulse, and not giving herself time to think, she said, almost petulantly:

"I believe, if I remain here much longer, I shall be almost persuaded to be a Christian too."

And Nelson answered, earnestly, "'I wish thou wert, not only almost, but altogether, persuaded.'"

Just then came Susie, to announce that a picnic had been planned for the day.

"The carriage will be at the door in half an hour," she said.

Whereupon Edna escaped to her room.

"I expect they'll turn it into a prayer-meeting!" she said, desperately. "He's the worst one of them all! Why, if he looked at me that way long, I should do something foolish."

She went on with her toilet, as she talked, not forgetting to make herself as charming as possible.

"Be sure and put your journal in your pocket, Mr. Keith," she said, when she met him in the hall. "You haven't told us anything about your travels, and it will be nice to have you read to us when we are tired."

"Is it best for me to humor this young lady, mother?" he said, laughingly.

Mrs. Keith smiled,—a rich, happy smile. Her son was so very dear to her heart, could there be anything about his journeyings that would not be of interest to her?

"Why not?" she asked, eagerly. "It would be delightful to hear of your travels."

"If nothing more, you can read us to sleep," said Edna, naively.

Nelson laughed.

"Now I shall take it, just to punish you," he said, gayly.

And then he ran lightly up-stairs to get it.

Meantime the coming of the carriage was heralded.

"Sure, an' the carriage is afther bein' at the door," said Pat.

And a moment later they were speeding away in the glorious summer sunshine.

Perhaps none of them would ever forget that drive. They laughed, they talked, they sang. At every step they stirred odorous mosses, and the cloudless summer morning waxed indolent-

ly on toward splendid noon. And presently grove-crowned Beach Hill appeared in view.

"Now for a game of croquet," said Edna. "Mr. Keith, I challenge you for the first game."

So, behold them, half an hour after, spinning the balls over the ground.

Now, it so happened that Nelson Keith was a champion player, and Miss Edna soon found that she had more than her match to deal with.

"I'm playing abominably," she said, somewhat testily, throwing down her mallet.

Whereupon Susie clapped her hands.

"Do you acknowledge yourself beaten?" she said.

"I confess to being hungry," Edna returned, laughingly.

"An' dinner's afther bein' ready," announced Bridget at that moment.

What a delightful dinner it was, to be sure. And how they all enjoyed the tempting delicacies Mrs. Keith had provided.

After dinner they lounged idly on the grass for awhile. Then Edna said, roguishly:

"Where's your journal, Mr. Keith? I'm sleepy, and perhaps you could read me to sleep."

She looked like an artless child as she leaned carelessly against a giant tree, and Nelson Keith stood regarding her with an amused smile. He had never come in contact with just such an exquisite thistle-down specimen of femininity before, and he observed the little lady, with her bright, coquettish ways and winning smile, with a good deal of wonder. Evidently she resented anything like serious talk, whereas light small-talk, and jesting, were her peculiar forte. Thus much close watching revealed to him.

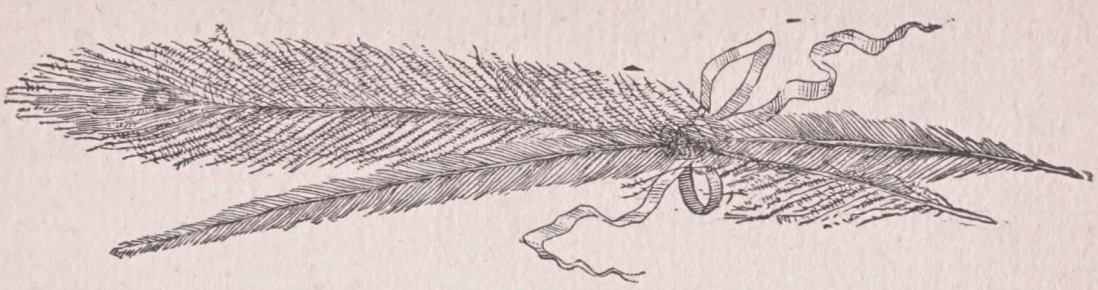
"She is a little bundle of vanity," he said to himself, an amused smile hovering around his lips. Then, aloud:

"My dear Miss Byford, you have no idea what you are asking. However, you have

brought the infliction on yourself, so you must not complain if it is severe."

And while he said this, he drew the journal from his pocket.

"Dear me!" said Edna, laughing, "you quite frighten me, Mr. Keith."



CHAPTER VII.

"WELL, I will not wait to be urged," he said, smiling. "My first entry is dated June 12, 18—:

I am pacing the deck in the absolute stillness of midnight, on mid-ocean. Not a sound breaks the silence but the ripple of the waters, as we plough our trackless way through them. In mid-heavens hangs the great silvery moon, lighting up the weirdly beautiful picture, until I feel like exclaiming: "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the East: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory!"

LIVERPOOL, July 3.—What a rest to be on land again; but, as there is nothing remarkable about Liverpool, I shall speed away to London, thence across the channel to Paris.

PARIS, July 20.—The grand capital of "La Belle France" is one of the wonders of the world. And what an overwhelming number of things there are to be seen, to be sure. The Garden of the Tuileries, the Champs Elysees, the Louvre, the Palais Royal, the Hotel des Invalides, the Columns of Vendome, the Arc de Triomphe; the Seine, with its twenty-seven beautiful bridges, and the one hundred or more churches of the city, all go to form a grand spectacle. The Church of Notre Dame is considered one of the finest monuments of its particular style of architecture in France.

July 23.—To-day I visited Fontainbleau, which is about forty miles southeast of Paris. After walking through the Palace Garden, I was conducted through forty-one rooms of the palace, and at last found myself in the very room, standing by the very table on which Napoleon signed his abdication, prior to his departure for Elba; also, the identical room where the fatal decree was pronounced that

separated him from Josephine. Alas! what an empty bauble ambition is. What a contrast between the great emperor, and the Napoleon who, with his armies scattered, his empire broken, his fame tarnished, died alone upon the bleak rock of St. Helena.

ROME, September 4.—Through scenery unsurpassed in its wondrous grandeur and beauty, I at last reached Genoa, and from there, by steamer, to Rome. And now, with my own eyes, I behold the "Eternal City,"—grand, historic, ancient Rome; the seat of the Cæsars, of whom I have read so much. It is impossible to describe it; it is impossible to convey an idea of the picture Rome presents, seated on her seven hills, and surrounded by the mountain ranges of Soracte, Albano, and the Apennines on one side, and the broad plain and distant sea on the other. Away across the Tiber, on the extreme eastern border, stands St. Peter's, in all its glory; while in the southern suburbs, are the Colosseum, the Temple of

Vesta, the Arch of Constantine, and the ruins of the Palace of the Cæsars, the Temples of Saturn and Vespasian, and of Constantine's Temple of Peace. In the centre of the city is the Pantheon, erected by Marcus Agrippa, a quarter of a century before Christ; a little to the left, the Trojan Column, and out by the Roman Forum and Palatine Hill, the eye traces the main avenue leading to the Appian Way, one of the great high-roads in the Campagna. These are only a few of the prominent objects that meet my eye, as I stand here exultant at the long-coveted sight.

September 6.—No, it is not a dream! I have stood beneath the dome of St. Peter's, and upon my astonished gaze has burst its resplendent light, magnificence, and beauty. But, beyond all powers of description is the vast cathedral. I can only stand lost in wonder at its immensity. I do not wonder that Mendelssohn said: "It appears to me like some great work of Nature,—a forest, a mass of

rocks, or something similar; for I never can realize that it is the work of man."

VENICE, October 4.—How can I describe Venice? How bring before you a city that has canals instead of streets, gondolas instead of carriages? The Grand Canal is lined with magnificent old palaces, rising up from the sea, and it requires only a little stretch of the imagination to fancy a spy lurking in every massive door-way. The Palace of the Doges presents a beautiful front toward the sea, and nearly opposite to St. Mark's is the campanile of that church, a square tower, three hundred and twenty-two feet in height, affording a magnificent view of the city, and country, and Adriatic sea, for miles around.

Yesterday, when I was in a gondola on the Grand Canal, I passed beneath the Bridge of Sighs, and I almost held my breath to listen for the slow, mournful step of some prisoner going to his doom. Ah! Venice by moonlight is especially beautiful, but a feeling of sadness

steals over me in the profound silence of the place.

ROME, January 1, 18—.—I have decided to pass the remainder of the winter in "Sunny Italy." And even then, if I see all there is to see, I shall not have done sight-seeing. I begin to think there is no limit to the churches in Rome; but it would be too tedious to enumerate, or attempt to describe, either them, or the statues, and relics, and curiosities, and paintings,—whose names are legion,—that are huddled together in my mind. Particularly beautiful, however, are Raphael's "Transfiguration," and "The Last Judgment," by Michael Angelo. Last night, I went to see the Colosseum by moonlight; and very aptly Lord Byron describes it:

"I do remember me, that, in my youth,—
When I was wandering,—upon such a night
I stood within the Colosseum's wall,
'Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome;
The trees, which grew along the broken arches,
Waved dark in the blue midnight, and the stars

Shone through the rents of ruin; from afar
The watch-dog bay'd beyond the Tiber; and
More near, from out the Cæsars' Palace, came
The owl's long cry, and, interruptedly,
Of distant sentinels, the fitful song
Begun and died upon the gentle wind."

NAPLES, January 20.—Yesterday I made a flying visit to Pompeii, and was guided from street to street, and from house to house, walking over three hours; and yet, I explored only a small portion of the ruins. In some of the shops the marble counters are still standing, and in a bakery, the large oven, in which a batch of bread was found burned to charcoal, still remains intact. The villa of Diomedes is one of the most extensive private residences yet discovered, and near the garden gate of this villa was found the skeleton of the owner, holding in his hand the keys of the villa. "Surely!" I exclaim, "the Master's words are true: 'Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.'"

LUCERNE, June 10.—And now I turn from

Art to Nature, and from Nature up to Nature's God. Yes, I have seen Mont Blanc, the Alpine monarch, towering over twelve thousand feet above me, in its solitary grandeur. And I seem raised, as it were, above the bustling, anxious world, to Him that sitteth on the throne, as I pause to remember how, leaving the low valleys and dead levels behind, and wiping the city's dust from His sandals, He sought the soaring solitude of the mountain's summit, to meditate, and commune with God. And how intimately mountains are connected with His memory. It was a mountain where He preached; it was a mountain where He was transfigured; it was a mountain from which He ascended. Then, who can stand upon Mont Blanc's dizzy summit, with the rugged peaks of many other mountains before him, and not think of "The place called Calvary," and the Cross.

DRESDEN, July 1.—The pride and glory of Dresden is the great Madonna of Raphael's,

and, like the other great pictures, in their several places, it is set there so it can not be removed. Wonderful, indeed, is this famous painting, with its dim, heavenly radiance, and angelic crowd pressing eagerly forward, to see the Savior of the world,—a babe in his mother's arms. Many other celebrated pictures there are in the picture galleries, but this one has a separate room devoted to its exhibition.

ANTWERP, July 20.—Here, in the principal cathedral—in strong contrast to Raphael's Madonna—is the great masterpiece of Rubens, "The Descent from the Cross." Surely, never was agony and death touched with such masterly force. The pallid sweat upon the brow; the helplessly swaying figure, that pitiful arms are outstretched to loosen from the wounding spikes; the white linen sheet, which tender respect is spreading to receive the sliding body, are so vividly *real* that I almost raised my arms to help support the precious

burden. Ah! what a tale of heroic suffering do those still features tell. And yet, the main expression of the countenance is not of agony or death. The final quiver on those lips was not of pain, but prayer. I think the inspired Watts must have stood before this picture when he wrote:

> "When I survey the wondrous cross
> On which the Prince of Glory died,
> My richest gain I count but loss,
> And pour contempt on all my pride."

"Oh, Nelson!" Susie said, breathlessly, "How I wish I could see it!"

He smiled down into the sweet, eager face, as he answered,

"Perhaps you will some day, little one. Who knows?"

And then the sun dropped down behind the distantly outlined hills, leaving in its wake a rosy glow, as they took their homeward way in the summer twilight.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE very next day the morning mail brought a letter for Edna.

"And none for me," said Susie, pretending to pout.

Edna laughed.

"I will share mine with you," she said, handing Susie a daintily written epistle.

It was an answer to Edna's letter, and one sentence was as follows:

"Charlie is getting up a camping party, and wants you to join it. They start about the fifteenth, so you had better make your plans accordingly."

"But we can't let you go!" cried Susie. "It will spoil all my plans for the summer!"

"And there is Mrs. Tremain's party on the twentieth," said Nelson, looking up archly into Edna's flushed, eager face.

The little lady blushed a little, and looked really regretful, for the Hon. Mrs. Tremain was a social star of such magnitude that even *her* aristocratic light quite paled before it. And then, this party was of more than common interest, as it was given in honor of Nelson's home-coming, so of course *he* would be the lion of the evening.

"I'll write to mamma, and postpone going until after that," she said, decisively.

"I wouldn't miss sharing your honors, Mr. Keith, for anything," she added, laughing.

Nelson bowed with mock gravity.

"I shall expect you to bear your share meekly," he answered, smiling.

"O, Edna will accept them as a matter of course," said Susie, laughing.

Whereupon Edna tossed her pretty head, and laughed brightly.

"We must have a boat-ride before Edna goes," Susie said, presently.

"A boat-ride!" cried Edna. "How charming."

"And why not to-day?" Nelson said. "The day is perfect."

"True enough," said Mrs. Keith. "If you carry out Susie's programme for Edna's visit, there is no time to spare."

"Wouldn't it be delightful if we met with some startling adventure," Edna said, looking up into Nelson Keith's face with that indescribable air of mingled childishness and coquetry.

"We'll gather pond lilies, Edna," said Susie, "and perhaps you can manage to tumble out of the boat; that would be a remarkable event."

"The idea!" said Miss Edna. "Why, that would take all the crimp out of my hair, and make me look horrid generally. No indeed, I prefer smooth sailing, after all."

During this conversation, Nelson stood, one hand idly toying with his watch chain, his eyes on Edna's face. Evidently, she both amused and puzzled him.

After that, the talk drifted into preliminary arrangements for the excursion.

"Of course we'll want a nice lunch, mamma," said Susie.

"Don't forget to put in some of those nice cream biscuit, Mrs. Keith," supplemented Edna.

"Cold chicken wouldn't be amiss," added Nelson. "By the way, three is always a crowd; perhaps we had better invite Dr. Gordon, to make an even number."

Edna gave her shoulders the least little suggestive shrug, which, interpreted, meant: "Now for another prayer-meeting."

Well, the final preparations were quickly made, the lunch duly packed, and two hours later they were floating idly with the current.

Back among the cushions sat Edna, her hat

trimmed, and lap filled, with waxen pond lilies. And presently she sang:

"No more, no more,
The worldly shore,
Upbraids me with its loud uproar!
With dreamful eyes,
My spirit lies
Under the walls of Paradise!"

Then, thrilling as a blast of trumpets, hushing them into absolute, terrified stillness, came a sharp peal of thunder.

"It's going to rain!" cried Edna, with a white, startled face.

"'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.'"

It was Dr. Gordon's quiet voice repeated the re-assuring words. And Nelson Keith added:

"He plants His footsteps on the sea,
And rides upon the storm."

Then they both worked with superhuman strength to steer their frail boat toward an island. Meanwhile, the dense, black clouds rolled on, like devouring wild beasts. Down came the rain in torrents, while ever and anon the vivid lightning flashed over the awful scene.

During all the turmoil and terror, Susie sat immovable, with hands tightly clenched, eyes dilated, and lips firmly closed. While Edna gave way to the wildest alarm, she uttered not a sound. And yet she *was* speaking, earnestly beseeching God to hold them securely in the hollow of His mighty hand. As for Dr. Gordon, his thoughts flew back to a little storm-tossed ship, on the sea of Galilee. And,—so vividly did the picture come before him,—it almost seemed to him that the Master must be lying asleep in *their* boat, and he well-nigh held his breath to listen to the low, calm, "Peace, be still!"

Presently the angry clouds belched forth

their awful fury in a frightful, deafening clap. Edna sprang wildly from her seat, the rocking boat tipped, and the flashing lightning revealed her struggling in the water. Instantly Dr. Gordon followed her. Once, twice, she went down before him; then he desperately clutched her long, golden hair, floating out upon the turbid water, and gently drew her to him. And then,—such is weak human nature,—a jealous pang shot through Susie Keith's heart. Then she grasped the deserted oars with heroic strength, and just as Dr. Gordon reached the island with his lifeless burden, Nelson Keith sprang to his assistance.

By this time the summer storm had done its worst, and the thunder was dying away in low, muttering growls.

"Is she dead, Nelson?" questioned Susie, every nerve quivering under this terrible strain.

"Tear open her clothes! Let us turn her over!" he said, in a clear, calm tone. "No, not so,—*so*. I wish we had some flannel."

Without a moment's hesitation, Susie unfastened her under-skirt, and tore it in pieces.

"Susie, you rub her chest," said Nelson, presently. "Rub *upward*, not down,—I'll show you."

Poor Susie! Nothing but a strong self-control prevented her from fainting, and so adding to the excitement.

They worked on silently for awhile, then Nelson looked at his watch, as if it held the arrested heart-beats of the life for which they fought. A moment more, and a slight quiver ran through the lifeless form,—so slight at first that Nelson hardly dared to believe it was a sign of life. He stooped to count the flickering pulse, and then her great eyes opened, and looked wonderingly into his.

"Where am I?" she asked, attempting to rise.

"You are safe," he answered, gently.

"Who are *you?*" she asked again, still looking at him confusedly.

"I am Dr. Keith, at your service," he said, smiling.

"How fortunate that we had a doctor with us," said Susie.

"Yes, I think it *was*," Nelson answered, gravely.

Then Edna remembered, and shuddered when she thought how very, very near she had been to death. She lay quite motionless, with closed eyes, for a moment, then she turned suddenly to Nelson.

"What if I had died, Dr. Keith!" she said.

And her white face expressed all the horror and dismay she felt at the thought.

For one brief instant he hesitated. Was it a fitting time, or place, for him to say anything but tranquilizing words to this frightened little lady? he questioned within himself. Then, he turned toward her, and it would be impossible to describe the exceeding gentleness of his voice, and manner, as he said:

"The Bible says: 'Be ye, therefore, ready

also: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.' "

She did not say to herself, "Preaching again." She had been too near death for that. But she looked with earnest, wistful eyes up into his, and said:

"Oh, Dr. Keith, it must be *terrible* to die!"

He did not attempt to answer her in his own words, and his voice had a ring of solemn joy, as he repeated:

"And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, 'Write, *Blessed* are the dead, who die in the Lord.' "

At this point, Susie interrupted them.

"Now for some luncheon," she said, cheerily.

"And then, for home, and some dry clothing," said Nelson.

Not a trace of the sudden, summer storm remained. The sweet stillness around them, and the indescribable freshness born of the shower, and the sunlight coming down out of the blue above, all spoke of peace; when, a half

hour later, they took their homeward way. Whatever world of fear Edna might be groping in, things outside her were unchanged. She sat silent, drinking in the river air with a little shudder. And between her and the sunlight, stood that terrible, pursuing phantom—Death.

Oh, that dreadful plunge into the water! and that going down, down, in his awful embrace. All her life she had been *so* afraid of the frightful spectre, never allowing herself to think of him, ignoring his very existence. And here he had actually *forced* himself upon her notice. Could it be possible, that sometime,—willing or not,—she must yield to his control? Was there *no* way to evade his remorseless grasp?

Even to her pillow, these gloomy thoughts followed, and she tossed, and turned herself, then thumped and turned her pillow; but, try as best she could, it was impossible to banish the fearful "*might have been*" from her mind.

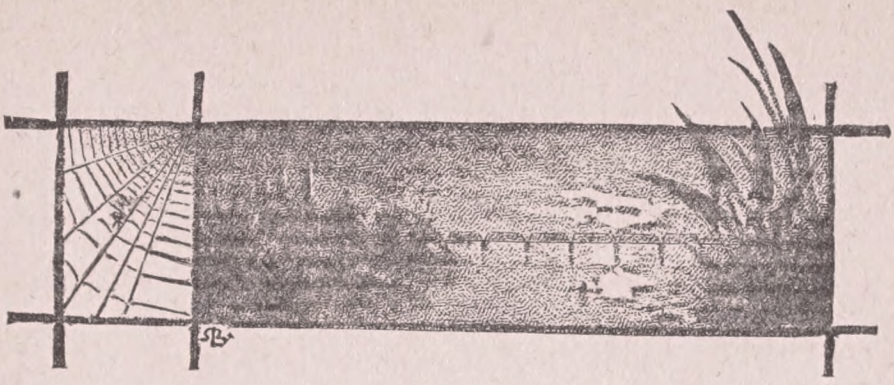
The tormenting question *would* repeat itself: "If Dr. Keith had not been there, I might have died! What then?" At last, she grew quite desperate, so she arose, threw a light wrap around her, and nestled up in the broad window-seat.

"If I could only think of something else," she said.

And Satan, ever watchful, suggested Mrs. Tremain's party,—and what should she wear to it?

"Let me see," she said, "I must write to mamma to-morrow, and have my dress ordered. I think cream satin will be just lovely, and that elegant lace over-dress papa gave me last Christmas will be just the thing. And, I guess, I'll wear my diamonds. The Sycamore girls will go just wild with envy, when they see *them.*"

By this time, the little lady's thoughts were thoroughly diverted, and before she left the window, she had every minute detail of her magnificent toilet planned.



CHAPTER IX.

IN due time the evening of the party came; and Edna, resplendent in creamy satin, and diamonds, entered the room where Nelson Keith waited for her.

Beautiful? Why, if she had just stepped from some painter's canvas she could not have made a lovelier picture. She entered the room with inimitable grace, and Nelson Keith's beauty-loving eyes took in at a glance every detail,—from the golden hair, caught carelessly by a diamond spray, to the satin slippers and perfectly fitting gloves; and you will admit that it was by no means strange that those same eyes expressed admiration. Now, Edna was well versed in the ways of gentlemen, but she was not conversant with the fact

that admiration and *esteem* may mean two very different things. So, when her heart gave a little, exultant bound at the thought of this last conquest, she did not know that Nelson Keith would have bestowed the same look on a landscape painting, where all the exquisite tints of color were blended into one perfect harmony.

"Ah, is this Miss Byford, or some fairy queen that has deigned to honor me with her presence?" he said, smiling.

Edna laughed her sweet, silvery laugh.

"If I *was* a fairy queen," she said, "do you know what I would do?"

"Perhaps you would have a pumpkin chariot, and go to the party Cinderella fashion," he answered, laughing.

"No, indeed!" she said, decisively, "I would stretch forth my sceptre and banish care, and sorrow, from the world.

She toyed carelessly with her fan as she spoke, but in her blue eyes there was a look

of thoughtfulness. And Nelson, seeing the look, answered gravely:

"The Bible tells us: '*Godly* sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation.'"

Edna gave her head a little, impatient toss.

"Now, Mr. Keith, don't talk religion!" she exclaimed, turning upon him with a half-imperious, half-appealing gesture. "Besides, I don't believe one word of the nonsense anyway," she went on, desperately. "I believe if we *are* to be saved, we *shall* be, and that is all there is about it."

"It is written: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,'" he returned, quietly.

She glanced at him quickly. Perhaps she expected he would be shocked, or displeased. But not a feature of his finely cut face betrayed either surprise or vexation. And before she had time to reply, a servant opened the door and announced the carriage.

Meanwhile, Susie had been sitting for half an hour with her mother.

"O mamma," she had said, when she entered the room, "you never in your life saw anything so pretty as Edna is to-night!"

Mrs. Keith only smiled quietly at her daughter's enthusiasm. Then she gently arranged the misplaced leaf of a waxen tube-rose at her throat, before she answered:

"'The King's daughter is all glorious *within*,' darling."

Susie's sweet face flushed a brighter glow.

"Yes, I know what you mean, mamma," she said.

"And this glorious inner beauty never fades," Mrs. Keith continued, "but will grow fairer, and more lovely, as the years go by, until we awake, satisfied with His likeness."

"But you don't think it wrong to want to look nice, mamma?" said Susie, looking down dubiously, at her delicate pink-tinted dress of silk.

"God clothes the flowers in becoming array," Mrs. Keith answered, "and makes the summer bright and joyous by their presence. He fashioned the tube-rose at your throat, in its waxen beauty, and gave to it its exquisite perfume. But, without its sweet fragrance, the flower would lose its most potent charm. So, darling, purity of character enhances human loveliness, and adds the crowning grace to form and feature. 'Seek *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness,' is the divine command. If we do this, there is little danger that our thoughts will be engrossed with empty pride."

Mrs. Keith looked down into her fair young daughter's face as she said this. Then she stooped, and kissed the delicate, flushed cheek tenderly.

And Susie had a gem of thought to carry with her to the party. And all through the evening, she moved serenely amid the brilliant throng, wondering within herself how many

of the people there assembled, possessed this everlasting beauty.

The Tremain mansion was aglow with light, and carriage after carriage rolled rapidly up, depositing the wealth and fashion of the place. Up and down the rooms, brilliant, detached bits of conversation flashed, till the entrance of our party produced a sudden lull. Not many steps had they taken down the long drawing-room, before it became evident they were creating that indefinable thing—in society called "a sensation." It was not an unusual thing to Edna, for even in Chicago, where youth and beauty are by no means rare, the daughter of Erasmus Byford, the millionaire, was quite likely to receive especial notice. And she walked beside her tall, stately escort, with an air of easy nonchalance.

But not a whit more self-possessed appeared she than Susie, who seldom attended fashionable parties. And something in the girl's calm, sweet face attracted the attention of two

gentlemen, standing a little apart from the crowd.

"There is a face," said Mr. Moss, "that will be as handsome at forty as it is to-night."

"What makes you think so?" said Will Ellerton, looking, with well-bred curiosity, at Susie.

"Because," responded Mr. Moss, decisively, "if I am not mistaken, her face reflects the beauty of her soul."

Will Ellerton arched his eyebrows, and puckered his mouth into the form of a whistle. As for him, he never looked beneath the surface. If the face was fair, the figure good, the dress immaculate, what cared he for the soul? And so he answered, lightly,

"Upon my word, you surprise me, Moss! I didn't think you was given to moralizing. Now, *I* prefer the other one. *She's* style, every inch of her." And then he furtively raised his opera-glass, to get a better view.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Tremain flitted among her guests.

"My dear Miss Byford," she said, "I have your name down for one or more songs during the evening. Now, I hope you will be good and obliging, and not spoil my programme."

Miss Edna assented, feeling very much gratified that an opportunity would be given for her to display her wonderful musical proficiency.

Then Mrs. Tremain turned sweetly to Susie.

"I have your name on my list, also, Miss Keith," she said.

"Oh, Mrs. Tremain, please—" But Mrs. Tremain would not let her finish the sentence.

"I really will not excuse you, my dear girl," she said, in her charming, imperious way. And then she gracefully glided away.

Meanwhile, from the dancing-room came witching strains of music; and Edna's feet fairly ached to join the dancers.

"What possible harm *can* there be in dancing!" she questioned, within herself. "I *do* wish Mr. Keith would ask me."

But not a thought had Nelson of indulging the little lady. For him, the question had long ago been settled, that the command: "And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," did not refer to dancing.

"Miss Byford, are you engaged for the next set?"

Exquisite Will Ellerton said this, making his most approved dancing-school bow as he spoke.

Edna's face brightened visibly, as she arose and deftly shook out the sheeny folds of her dress. And young Ellerton thought himself happy, because he had secured the belle of the evening for his partner.

Presently there came a lull in the dancing. Then Nelson Keith led Miss Byford to the music-room. And now, those who had never heard Edna Byford sing, were awed into absolute silence. Not a tremor marred the magnificent voice as, rich, and clear, and fully

rounded, it filled the spacious rooms with melody.

"Her voice is simply perfect," said one.

"If we could only secure her for our church," said another.

So the flattering comments ran on.

And Nelson Keith's heart throbbed as he stood beside her, turning her music,—not with pride, that he was thus standing, her acknowledged escort for the evening; but with sincere, tender pity for the young girl, so intoxicated with flattery that her blood fairly tingled with its subtle poison.

Very gracefully she arose from the piano, and swept out her trailing robes. And Will Ellerton would have given a month's salary for one such bright, bewildering glance as she flashed up into the grave face of Nelson Keith.

A little later, Mrs. Tremain came over to where Susie was standing, talking earnestly to Mr. Moss—who had sought, and received, an introduction.

"I am sorry," she said archly, "to interrupt so interesting a conversation. But really, Mr. Moss, I have a prior claim upon Miss Keith. By the way, perhaps she will permit you to attend her to the music-room."

"I shall be most happy," Mr. Moss answered, promptly.

And presently they crossed the room together.

"What shall I sing?" Susie asked herself this question. And some wonderful telegraphy flashed across her mind an answering thought. Then her face brightened, and she softly played the prelude; then sang:—

"I have a Savior, He's pleading in glory,
A dear, loving Savior, tho' earth-friends be few.
And now He is watching in tenderness o'er me,—
And Oh! that my Savior were your Savior too!"

It would be impossible to describe the exceeding, persuasive tenderness the clear, soft voice gave to the closing line. And if Susie had really intended to create a sensation, cer-

tainly she could not have chosen a better theme.

"The *idea* of singing psalms at a fashionable party," said Miss Edna, almost spitefully, to Will Ellerton, who sat beside her, toying idly with her fan.

"It *is* something new, that's a fact," answered Will. "But, for all that, she made a success of it."

Edna shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"Do you think so?" she said, coldly. And, though it seems almost incredible, there was a ring of envy in her voice.

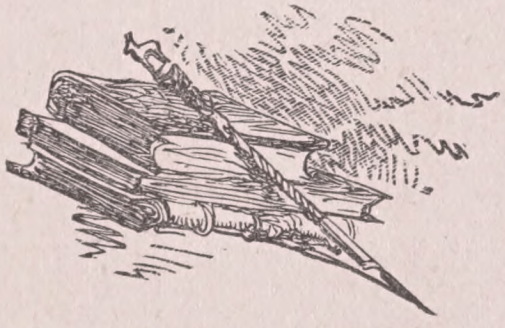
"I'm not much of a psalm-singer myself," answered Mr. Ellerton, twitching nervously at the fan he held, "but mother used to sing that very piece, and, some way, I can never hear it without seeing her, just as she used to look."

Ah! the blessed memory of a lovely, Christian mother. What a safeguard it is to a wayward boy. How it shields him from temptation,

and draws him back from the very brink of ruin.

As for Mr. Moss, his earnest, manly face was radiant as Susie arose, amid the hush of hearts, and took his arm.

"Miss Keith," he said, "I thank you; you have helped me. If I had the courage, I would sing: 'Let the lower lights be burning.'"



CHAPTER X.

MEANTIME, Dr. Gordon, in dressing-gown and slippers, paced his study, fighting a fierce battle with himself. Over, and over again, he called himself a senseless idiot, for having the battle to fight at all; for, truth to tell, his *better* judgment was against him in the conflict. But then, older men, and perhaps wiser, have thrown discretion and judgment to the winds, when a pretty face weighed in the balance.

Now, up to this time, Dr. Gordon had supposed himself to be quite invulnerable to the witching wiles of women. He had successfully run the gauntlet of idolizing femininity, and perhaps he had forgotten the injunction: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Be this as it may, he could not himself comprehend how this slow, subtle,

powerful charm had crept through his veins, and won him, against himself, through his senses.

"I must decide the matter *here*, and *now*," he said, at last.

Then he opened his Bible; but he closed it again, almost impatiently, when he read, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

In ordinary states of mind, Dr. Gordon would have sought the Lord, and abided by *His* decision,—indeed he had done so, time and again, in this matter, for this was not his first hour of reasoning about the subject in question. But ever between him and his God there came a tantalizing vision of a lifeless form held close to his heart, while a wealth of golden hair almost entangled him in its silken meshes. Ah me! the day of the boat-ride had been an unlucky day to Dr. Gordon, bringing about him perplexities of which he had not dreamed. And yet, be it understood, in all the ensuing

controversy his *better* nature never wavered. In his inmost heart, he knew that Edna Byford touched only the sensual side of his character; that, were he to do as he felt inclined, his whole after-life would be crippled, his work only half done.

Being the man that he was, and living a life of devoted self-consecration, as he generally did, it seems almost incredible that he did not turn instantly away from this delusive temptation. But there are times of special trial for us all; happy is the man to whom it need not be said, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."

Presently, quite worn out with his annoying thoughts, he went over to the window and leaned out into the midnight stillness. It chanced, at that particular moment, that a light, silvery laugh floated from a passing carriage, and the summer wind bore it to his ear. Then he went away to his room, feeling strangely sad. Many a time had he entered

that room burdened, and unutterably cast down. And many a time had he gone out from it with strength renewed, and the glory of the Lord illuminating his pathway; making crooked places straight, and rough places plain. But on the evening in question, his distracted thoughts refused to concentrate in prayer. And his petition for divine guidance was strangely mixed with worldly passions and desires.

Then, was it wonderful that he failed to hear a voice, saying: "This is the way, walk ye in it?" Or was it singular that his face was pale, and troubled, when, on the morrow, he made preparation for his walk, having decided that with Miss Byford should rest the decision of his fate.

Nevertheless, his resolution faltered somewhat when he caught a glimpse of Susie, flitting here and there among her flowers, singing softly, to herself, the precious hymn:

"O for a heart to praise my God."

She did not hear his foot-step, for she went on singing :

"A heart in every thought renewed,
And full of love divine;
Perfect, and right, and pure, and good,
A copy, Lord, of thine."

Dr. Gordon could see in her sweet, peaceful face the reflex of the words she sang, as he paused involuntarily to listen, and for an instant his higher nature tried to assert itself. Then, a laughing voice said :

"Why, Dr. Gordon, you look as solemn as a funeral! Let me put this rose in your button-hole, to 'liven you up a little."

Saying which, Edna Byford came toward him, in the daintiest of dainty morning robes, and that wonderful golden hair, that had so ensnared him, curling in witching waves over her white brow. She reached up, with pretty, coquettish daring, to fasten the flower in place ; and then,—well, the hot blood of twenty-eight tingled through his veins, and he took the

little upraised hand and held it in both of his,—and then he said words that made the little lady start, and exclaim:

"Why, Dr. Gordon, I never dreamed of such a thing!"

He drew her gently away among the shrubbery then, and his earnest voice was full of pleading, as he told her the old, yet ever new, story. A rare glow spread all over her face as she listened, and her voice was touched with *real, genuine* feeling, when she answered:

"Oh, Dr. Gordon, I am not worthy! You don't know what you are saying."

Before this sentence was concluded, Dr. Gordon was drawing a ring,—of priceless value to him, because it had been his mother's,—from his pocket, and without a word he slipped it over her finger. And she, vain little coquette that she was, looked down upon the glittering trinket, saying within herself, "It won't do any harm to wear it for awhile. It will make the girls *so* envious to see it. I mean to tease

him for his picture; he's *so* handsome, they'll go just wild with envy."

But Dr. Gordon knew nothing of this musing; to him, the downcast eyes spoke only of modesty. So now, he held her hand in a close, warm clasp as he said, very softly, almost under his breath:

"We will walk heavenward, hand in hand."

She understood him, but this was not at all the manner of love-making to which she was accustomed. But then, Dr. Gordon was a minister, so, of course, very different from the flippant young men of her set. Still, he mustn't for one moment suppose that she was a child, to be led and dictated to. So she answered, lightly,—

"Now, Dr. Gordon, you won't expect me to be strait-laced and proper?"

And then Susie,—happily ignorant of this interesting tete-a-tete,—came quickly toward them, a telegram in her hand.

"A dispatch for me!" said Edna, and her hand trembled nervously as she opened it.

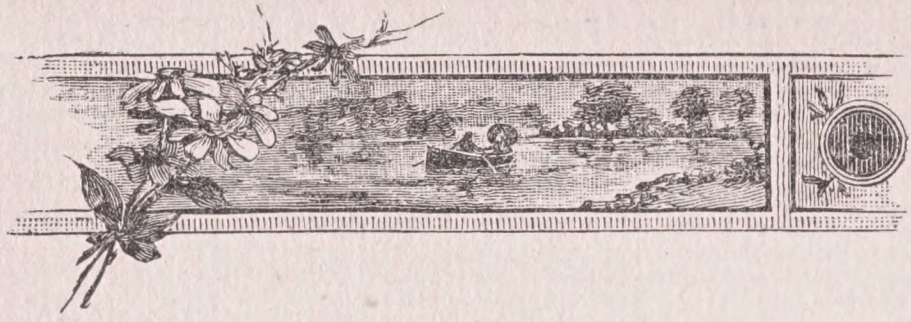
"Our party will start two days sooner than expected; so come without delay," thus the message ran.

"What shocking things telegraphic messages are!" she said, laughing a relieved little laugh, as she held it up for Dr. Gordon to read. "Well, I must start to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning!" echoed Susie.

"Yes, dear. By the way, that reminds me I have a trunk to pack, and various other preparations to make. So, au revoir, Dr. Gordon."

"No, come to think of it," she added, hastily, "I don't mean that. I don't want to see you in the morning. I hate good-by's," and she sighed,—a little, quickly-smothered sigh.



CHAPTER XI.

NEVERTHELESS, Dr. Gordon had paced the platform in front of the depot for fully ten minutes, before the Keith carriage drove up to it. He did not look like a successful wooer. Indeed, his usually beaming face was quite overcast, and gloomy.

"Oh dear!" sighed Edna, to herself, "what *does* make him look so doleful? Who would have supposed he'd care for me, anyway?"

Then she held up her finger, on which their engagement ring glistened, and said, in her pretty, imperious way:

"Now, Dr. Gordon, this is against orders; I told you that I didn't want to see you this morning." Then, almost impatiently, "And here I've made all manner of excuses for delay, so there would be no time for farewells!"

Just then the train gave a premonitory shriek, and Nelson hurried away to the ticket office, while Dr. Gordon hastily grasped various satchels and parcels, with one hand, while the other did duty in assisting the ladies. And if Edna wished to avoid all sentimentalism, certainly she had succeeded, for he had barely time to find a desirable seat, and arrange everything to the little lady's liking, before the train gave its last warning puff.

"Let me know if you arrive safely," he said, hurriedly shaking her hand.

Then the train began to move, and was in quick motion before he sprang from the steps.

"Plenty of room in the carriage, Dr. Gordon," said Nelson, heartily.

And then they drove away, in the summer sunshine.

"We must make Miss Byford a special subject of prayer, Doctor," Nelson said, with great earnestness.

And Dr. Gordon started, almost guiltily, at

the words. Was it his promised wife that Nelson Keith refered to?

Very heavy was his heart, and he sighed,—a little, inward sigh,—as he thought of her, in her elegant home, surrounded by all the temptations of fashionable life. And he admitted to himself, that his exquisite betrothed very much needed the environment of specific prayer. But he could say nothing of this to Mr. Keith. So he spoke of the influence of prayer in general; and told of manifold instances he had known, where God had blessed such special pleading. Alone in his room, however, he sank upon his knees, and poured out his over-burdened soul, before his never-failing Helper.

Meantime, Edna sped on her way; her thoughts in a tumult of conflicting emotions. But, perhaps, the predominating feeling was surprise. Often, in the course of her young life, she had thought,—as what girl of seventeen has not,—of the time when an engagement ring would glisten on her finger. And

yet, now it was really there, she could hardly realize how it had all come to pass. She frowned as she turned it round, and looked at it critically. Then she laughed,—a wicked little laugh,—as she said,

"Well, whose fault is it?"

Nevertheless, she was not insensible to the trust it implied. The atmosphere of her visit lingered about her, and words spoken during that time still thrilled her through and through, with their solemn meaning. She would not have been willing to admit this, professed skeptic that she was; yet Dr. Gordon's words, "We will go heavenward, hand in hand," made her heart throb strangely. Was *she*, indeed, journeying toward that heavenly city?

"Ah, no!" the question answered itself.

She did not believe in immortality at all. This she told herself. And yet, an intruding thought suggested, "What if all this religious cant is *true?* What if there *is* a Heaven,—yes, and a hell? What then?"

This last, as the train steamed into the Chicago depot. Then, a young man, who for the last half-hour had been tapping his immaculate boots with a tiny cane, pressed his way eagerly through the crowd to meet her.

"Glad to see you, Sis!" he said, "Hanged if I ain't!"

"Well, I'm glad to get home," she replied, gathering up her parcels and handing them to him.

"One, two, three," he said, counting them as he took them. "Odd numbers are always lucky. Well, come on, Jack and the carriage are round the corner."

"Folks all well?" questioned Edna, when comfortably seated.

"Old man's a little shaky," he responded. "Guess it's nothing serious, though. Tell you what, Sis, the house has been as dull as a funeral since you've been gone. Girls all afraid to come near, for fear your humble servant would think they were running after him, I suppose."

"Charlie Byford! How you do run on," said Edna, at this point. And *such* slang!"

Charlie laughed good-naturedly.

"What do you think of the camping party?" he went on. "Didn't much think you'd come."

"I was quite ready, or I should not," she replied, nonchalantly.

"Pious sort of people—the Keiths?" he said, flippantly. "Don't wonder you got enough of it. Bet your sweet life, I fight clear of the canting hypocrites."

Now, you know what class of people Charlie Byford belonged to. Many there are in the world like him,—persons who can not repeat one out of the ten commandments correctly; who yet assume to know, all there is to learn, both of law, and doctrine. Now, Edna had listened to this kind of talk from her infancy. But she could not pass two months in the society of cultivated, earnest Christians, like the Keiths, and not recognize the manifest

difference between people of their stamp and her foppish brother. And her lip curled disdainfully, as she said:

"I dont think you *would* feel at home with them."

"I tell you, Sis," he went on, not seeming to notice the latent sarcasm, "I've made up our party from the cream of our set."

Edna arched her eyebrows.

"Who *is* the cream?" she said, smiling.

"Well, there's Mabel Lester, she's cream; and Ella Faircourt, she's creamier; and Edith Upton, she's creamiest. Then there's young Worthington, I knew *you'd* want *him*."

"Humph!" was all the answer Edna deigned to give to this.

"He's the biggest catch of the season," he said, eagerly. "Worth a cool half million this minute. You'll be a simpleton if you let *him* slip through your fingers."

"I *do wish* you *would* talk a little common sense!" answered Edna.

And then silence fell between them,—broken suddenly by Charlie, exclaiming:

"I'll be hanged!"

Then he twirled his incipient mustache, and looked in mute amazement at that significant ring.

"Well, what of it?" said Edna, with provoking coolness.

"Does the old lady know it?"

Edna laughed.

"I hardly know it myself," she said, lightly.

"I wonder what you'll do with young Worthington?" queried Charlie.

"If *I* have *two* strings to my bow, I won't be the first girl that *has*," she answered, lightly.

"Wh—e—w, that's the game, is it?" he retorted. "Well, I guess you can play it, if any one can. But if I was you, I'd look out for the money."

At this point the carriage stopped, and Charlie's final word was,—

"Well, I guess the old lady'll have some-

thing to say. *She's* dead gone on Worthington."

Edna's eyes flashed.

"If *I* am satisfied, I can't imagine why any one else should complain," she said, loftily.

And then they went up the steps of their palatial home, to be greeted by their mother. Very elegant, and youthful, and altogether charming, looked Mrs. Byford, as she stood in the open door-way waiting to receive her children. And strange indeed it seemed to think of her as "the old lady." But a very different mother was she from Mrs. Keith,—who wore her grace of motherhood like a crown. Ah me! Many mothers there are, like Mrs. Byford, who care well for the body that perisheth, forgetting utterly the never-dying soul.

Now this mother scanned her daughter's face closely.

"You are looking well, dear," she said. "Not at all sun-burned, as I feared you would be after two months' rusticating. By the way,

I want you to look your best this evening. I invited Mr. Worthington to take tea with us, so you would not be lonely the first evening of your return."

"Mr. Worthington!" said Edna, her cheeks aglow.

Whereupon Charlie laughed, and, by sundry motions and grimaces, directed his mother's attention to Edna's finger. And Mrs. Byford burst forth, volubly:

"Why, Edna Byford, what silly freak ever induced you to wear a ring on that finger?"

"Now, mamma, for pity's sake don't say any more about it!" Edna said, desperately. "Charlie's been teasing me about it all the way home," saying which, she turned abruptly, and went hurriedly to her own room.

"What a fuss they all do make over it," she said, pettishly, tossing her hat and satchel on the bed. "Mr. Worthington! The idea! Why, he's good for nothing but a figure-head for a tailor's window."

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER a few days of active bustle, the camping party, composed of "the cream, creamier, creamiest, of our set," were actually en route for Geneva Lake. A looker-on would have pronounced it a medley company. But that talismanic word, *position*, united them on common ground. To a close student of human nature, there would have been infinite amusement, in studying the different temperaments represented among them. And the obsequious attention the young ladies of the party bestowed upon Mr. Worthington would have been highly diverting. Most of them classified him as *so* handsome,—and so he was, to those who admire the unintellectual, flesh-and-blood only style of beauty. But selfishness, and self-indulgence, are not sculptors who bring out

the finer lines, and Edna's lips curled utterly when she compared him with Nelson Keith and Dr. Gordon. However, it was evident that Charlie Byford was not the only one who considered him "the biggest catch of the season." And, evidently, the young gentleman in question fully coincided with them in their decision. He was the sort of person who, had he been poor, would have fawned upon the rich. So, perhaps, it was not strange that he estimated his friends by their dollar-and-cent value. Very few people there were he esteemed his equals; and, moreover, he was remarkably careful that his friends should recognize this important fact. It has been said that we are valued by others as we estimate ourselves. Consequently, it was not wonderful that most people humored him in this fancy. His most intimate friend was Charlie Byford, which was strange—they were so wholly unlike.

To be sure, Charlie was the only son of

Erasmus Byford, the millionaire; but he was a light-hearted, free-and-easy young man, who had no idea of life except as a place in which to have a jolly good time. If his good times were oftentimes of a questionable character, perhaps he owed it more to his surroundings than himself. Money was a thing of the smallest importance to him, for he had never known what it was to be without it. All he cared for, was to have all the fun and frolic that money could buy. Yet he was by no means without character; on the contrary, the right sort of education would have developed him into a splendid man. But most of people are ready to admit that opulence and flattery are not good schools for the young. There had been a time when Mr. Byford intended to make his only son one of the firm of Byford & Co.; but his dislike for business was so manifest, and his foolish mother so fully sided with her idolized boy, that the project was abandoned.

As for the ladies of the party, Edith Upton was, as Charlie Byford styled it, "the creamiest" of them all. Now, there was no make-believe aristocracy about the Uptons. They were cultured, traveled, wealthy. Their home was a model of grand magnificence; and in that palatial home Miss Upton reigned supreme,—its royal mistress. And right royally did she wield her sceptre, and happy indeed was the aspirant to social dignity whom this magic wand beckoned within the charmed circle; for a card to her receptions was like an open passport to the *élite* of the city. In person, Miss Upton was tall, and stately, with great, dark eyes, that flashed scornfully on anything and everybody not up to *her* standard of excellence. *She* did not bow down to money,—in fact, she professed to feel supreme contempt for mere wealth. *Her* especial hobby was social rank; and blue, indeed, must be the blood that she considered equal to her own.

Next to, in truth almost uniform in point of wealth and station with, Miss Upton, stood Miss Faircourt. But not a straw cared she for closely-drawn social lines. Indeed, in her peculiar set, she had earned the title of "queer," for she had been known to do "such a very odd thing" as to invite a common music-teacher to her parties. And not only that, she actually had tried to force her upon the notice of the chosen few in their aristocratic circle. To be sure, this same teacher was one of nature's noblewomen—grand and true in character; but she lacked the golden badge of affluence, or, in other words, did not belong to one of the "first families." Nevertheless, most people loved Ella Faircourt, for they were forced to acknowledge this very "queerness" was the outgrowth of a kind heart; and it was generally conceded that she was a remarkably nice girl, but *so* unlike any one else in their set they didn't know one-half the time

just how to take her. She laughed and tossed her pretty head when some one hinted this to her, and went her independent way, careless of criticism.

Next in order, stood Mabel Lester. The boys called *her* "a jolly girl, without any prudishness about her," and, truth to tell, there was no mischief for which she was not ready. Her family stood in constant dread of "Mabel's next wild freak,"—all except her father, who was rather pleased, than not, to have her outrage the extreme decorum of the "upper ten."

Fourth, in a dollar-and-cent ratio, came Edna; but, for some unexplained reason, she was a general favorite. She was so small, and witching, they all felt justified in petting her, and, as Edna was extremely fond of being petted, she was usually sweetness itself when with them. They had various pet names for her, "Pussie" being the one commonly used. And, come to think of it, the name was quite

typical, for nothing can be lovelier than a dainty white kitten, when it is purring good-naturedly. But let something aggravate it, and how quickly the ugly claws, concealed in its soft, velvety paw, reveal the wild beast sleeping in its nature. Of course, on this particular morning, there was a general cry of delight when "Pussie" Byford came among them. Instantly Mr. Worthington, who had been toying carelessly with Mabel Lester's fan, came forward to greet her.

"There now, Pussie," cried Mabel, "I thought for *once* Mr. Worthington was going to notice *me*, but I suppose *I* shall have no chance at all now."

"Pussie's carried off the prize; no use for *her* to try."

It was Miss Upton who whispered this, nudging Miss Faircourt, by way of emphasis.

Whereupon Miss Faircourt turned up her nose, contemptuously. And then, Miss Upton said, within herself, "O, my young lady, you're jealous! I know the signs."

"Ah, Miss Byford, I began to think you wasn't coming," said Mr. Worthington, with his most finished drawl.

Edna gave her shoulders a little shrug, and her lips had the least imperceptible curl as the young exquisite spoke.

"Here's a seat, Pussie," said Mabel, and Edna sank gracefully into it, while Mr. Worthington remained standing before them. At this point Mabel's eyes rested upon that tell-tale ring.

"Why Pussie," she said, in a loud whisper, looking up roguishly at Mr. Worthington, "I'd no *idea* it had gone so far!"

Edna colored a little.

"What a goose you are, Mabel," she said, almost impatiently.

Mr. Worthington bit his mustache, and cast a revengeful look at the inoffensive trinket.

"I wonder who the deuce it is, anyway?" he soliloquized. "I don't care a copper *who* it is, I'll,—" but the sentence was not finished, for

just then the train gave its last premonitory snort, and it was Miss Byford's elegant little satchel—with its initials of solid gold—that he grasped.

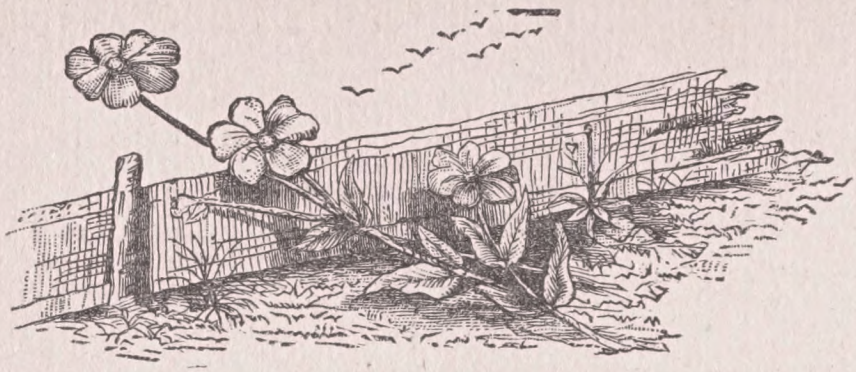
Evidently he intended, for that trip, at least, to make the dainty little lady his especial care. And every inch a lady looked she in her tailor-made costume of biscuit-brown, relieved at the throat and wrists by snowy bands of linen. Hat, and gloves, and every traveling accompaniment, were in elegant, perfect keeping, and completely suited the æsthetic taste of Mr. Worthington.

Meantime, Charlie Byford stood for an instant quite irresolute, as it seemed to be tacitly understood that the young lady selected then and there would be that gentleman's peculiar care through the remainder of the trip. Now Charlie's inclination pointed decidedly toward Mabel Lester. "She was *so* jolly, and not at all spooney." But over and over again, in family council, he had been

cautioned to secure Miss Upton, not only as a partner for this trip, but for life. So, much against his wishes, he cumbered himself with her belongings, and seated himself beside her in the car.

Now, it so happened that this was quite in accord with the young lady's wishes, for she had discovered that, with all his nonsense, he had more real manliness than most of the gentlemen in her set.

But how quickly time flies. While I have been introducing you to the party, the train has sped on its way, and, as I said before, they are actually en route for their camping-ground.



CHAPTER XIII.

MEANTIME, Susie was trying, with all the force of character she possessed, added to her womanly pride, to meet the inevitable. Ah me! It seems sad sometimes to see the rosy hue of morning overcast and gloomy. And yet, down through the intervening ages, rings the promise that "at evening time it shall be light." Oh, manifold and precious are the promises given to the sorrowful! And ever new is the cheering message: "The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

Now, to no human ear could Susie tell her story; so, straight to this never-failing refuge, this pitying confidant, this tender friend, she went, and wept out her humiliating confession.

And did He comfort her?

Did *you* ever seek Him when your heart was "exceeding sorrowful,"—when the very foundation seemed torn up beneath your feet? And did you never feel the "Peace, be still," settle down into your storm-tossed heart? If you have, I need not tell you, that then, and there, Susie verified the Psalmist's words,—"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."

But, for all that, life stretched out before her like an arid, sandy desert. For, alas! weak, human nature shrinks back appalled before the cross, and fain would grasp the crown of glory, without the crown of thorns.

"If I live to be forty," she thought, sadly, sitting down by the open window,—"what a long, *long* time it will be." Then a bright, rich glow suffused her face, as she remembered how, in all her thoughts of the misty future, Dr. Gordon had held a place.

"How *can* I ever listen to his preaching

again?" she said, desperately. "And he was beginning to help me so!" and then the glow on her cheeks deepened into crimson, as con science whispered that the prize toward which she had been pressing was the approbation of her idolized pastor. Ah! now you begin to think *her* a sentimental, lackadaisical simpleton; and *him* a wolf in sheep's clothing. But you are mistaken; he was nothing of the sort. Not one single word had he ever spoken to Susie Keith, that he would not have been willing to have proclaimed from the house-top. To be sure, he had been much interested in her spiritual development, and perhaps he had discerned more of the deep resources of her nature, than she herself understood. And seeing this, he had sincerely tried to elevate her to his high standard of Christian excellence; and he did not in the least realize, that into his manner had crept an exceeding tenderness. If he had, he would have been startled, and perhaps saved from doing what afterward

he would have given a great deal to undo,—for he was not, by any means, as happy as he might have been supposed to be. There could be nothing in common between him and his affianced bride, he was forced to admit; and his heart was heavy with dim forebodings.

Her first letter had been anything but satisfactory; truth to tell, she found it laborious work to write it. For, after she had exhausted the common-place news, what responsive thought had she for the exalted aspirations that were a part of his very being? When with her, her witching ways bewildered his senses, and made him forget any want of depth in her conversation. But, as he read her letter, there were no glorious eyes to hold him spell-bound; no dimpling, saucy smile to defy his reason. It was Saturday afternoon, and he sat in his pleasant study, sermon in hand, when it reached him. Of course, he dropped the manuscript, and forthwith devoured its contents; then, he held it in his

hand, and there floated dreamily before him the vision of a pure, sweet, thoughtful face. Quite unlike the face of his betrothed it was, and he laid the letter down with a little, troubled sigh, and gave close attention to his sermon. Twice before had he intended to preach that very sermon; and twice before had something in his own heart forbidden its utterance. Many and varied were the interlinings and alterations it had received; all to no purpose, for altogether too honest a man was Dr. Gordon to preach anything to his people that he could not exemplify in his own heart and life. So now he slowly read the grand, impressive text: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Could *he* sincerely say that "none of these things moved *him*," when at that moment his thoughts were distracted by carnal passions and desires?

Nay, verily he could not honestly preach that sermon on the coming Sabbath. If there was a verse in the Bible expressive of deep humility, surely *that* was the text for him, he thought, as he folded the much-abused manuscript, with a sigh. Then, feeling strangely humbled, and utterly helpless, he sank on his knees beside his study-chair. And kneeling there he prayed earnestly and simply for the help he needed, and entered anew into solemn covenant with his Savior to so watch his life, and heart, that his work might be blessed to the church, and to his own soul. And presently the help,—to none who ask, denied,—came, and he arose from his knees refreshed and strengthened.

As for Susie, she brushed from her eyes a few tears of mingled mortification and disappointment; then she said to herself, "Susie Keith, what *are* you thinking of? I am positively ashamed of you!" Then, more from force of habit, than premeditation, she opened her Bible, and her eyes rested on the words:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry."

She closed the book reverently. Then, after a long pause, she sang softly,—

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee."

And now, you are prepared to hear that the following Sabbath found Susie, with serene face, in her accustomed place. Nor will you be surprised to learn that Dr. Gordon came that morning from his closet to his pulpit, leaning on the Strong Arm. In a clear tone he announced his text: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

"Did you ever watch a little child," he said, "when it first tries to walk? Weak and trembling are the little limbs, and carefully the loving father upholds it, as it clings trustingly to his hand. Tenderly he steadies the little one upon its untried feet, and then, relying utterly upon its *father's* strength, it takes the first timid, tottering step. Time and again the little toddler falls, and time and again the patient father raises it, stands it upon its tiny feet, and gently urges it on, by holding before it some much-coveted thing,—perhaps his watch,—and the little hand is stretched out, pleadingly, to grasp the promised reward; and, after repeated trials, and many tumbles, it at last holds it triumphantly in its hand."

Quick as thought, Susie caught the meaning of the illustration. Wasn't *she* a helpless baby in Christ, stumbling and falling at every step? And didn't her kind, patient Father uphold her, in her weakness, lifting her when she fell, with his strong, everlasting arms of

love? And then she came back from her reverie, to hear Dr. Gordon say:

"Dear friends, the prize your Father offers you is eternal life."

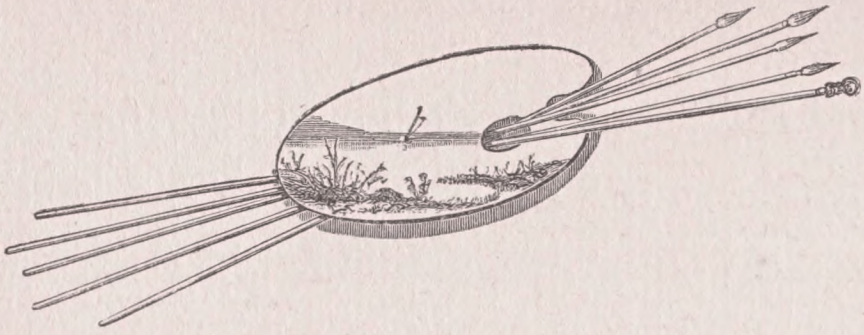
Ah! Added to all this watchful care and loving-kindness, there was a promise of reward. How wonderful! But how could *she* obtain it? Very eloquent and earnest were the speaker's words, as he went on with his sermon. And presently Susie's ear caught this sentence:

"'Without me ye can do nothing,' are the warning words of your Lord and Master."

And instantly her thoughts supplemented to these words, "But I can do *all* things through *Christ*, which strengtheneth me." So the sainted apostle said, and surely *he* must have known, for, though "troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, cast down," still at the end of his pilgrimage he could say: "I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous

judge, shall give me at that day." And Paul had gained the prize—not by any marvelous *human* strength. He had *pressed on*, fighting the sin which so easily beset him; glorying in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him; not reckoning the sufferings of the present time worthy to be compared with the glory which should be revealed in him. Just here, Susie's heart gave a bound of exultant joy, as she remembered that this same Christ was *her* Savior too. And, after all, Saint Paul had attained no sublime height to which *she* could not aspire, through Christ. And then, into her musing, came the notes of that grand old hymn:

"Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armor on,
Strong in the grace which God supplies
Through His eternal Son;
Strong in the Lord of Hosts,
And in His mighty power,
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
Is more than conqueror."



CHAPTER XIV.

THIS same Sabbath morning found our camping party fully settled at Geneva Lake. And restful, indeed, seemed their leafy retreat, with its perfect beauty of lake and grove, where the birds caroled their songs of praise, and every passing wind wafted the sweet perfume of a thousand flowers. All about them rested the Sabbath stillness, and into the peaceful silence, came the clear notes of the Sabbath bell. "Come,—come,—come,—" it repeated, over and over; but, quite unmindful of its invitation, three young ladies of the party lolled on their cots,—reading sensational novels,—while Edna lounged on a camp-chair, her writing-desk in her lap.

"I most wish we'd gone to church," said Miss Faircourt, rising on one elbow to listen.

"I didn't come prepared for anything civilized," Mabel Lester replied, lazily.

"Been kind of nice to have shown the country people some style," said Edna. "Wish we'd thought of it sooner."

Whereupon all these silly young ladies laughed.

"What a fashion-worshiper you are, Pussie," said Miss Upton, somewhat scornfully.

"Might as well be out of the world, as out of fashion," laughed Edna, good-naturedly.

Mabel Lester yawned.

"I know it's awfully wicked," she said, "but I sometimes wish there wasn't such a day in the week as Sunday."

"Why, Mabel Lester!" said Miss Upton, and her look expressed extreme surprise.

"Well, I don't care," Mabel went on, recklessly, "it's just *too* aggravating to think of those splendid blackberries going to waste, and here we are, afraid to go and pick them. And it will be *sure* to rain to-morrow."

"O you wicked creature!" said Edna, laughing, "I don't believe you've got any conscience."

"No, not a bit, and I don't believe *any* of you care one cent for the day *itself*, but you are afraid of what people will say. Now, Edith, you needn't arch your eyebrows, and look so horrified. Do *you* really care any more for Sunday than you do for Monday?"

"I care for common decency," said Miss Upton, loftily. "*I'm* not a heathen!"

"I rather think a missionary might find a good field for labor in your immediate vicinity, though," Mabel retorted. "For *my* part, I don't think it is any worse to go blackberrying on Sunday than it is to read novels. If I remember right, it says, somewhere in the Bible, that we are not even to think our own thoughts on the Sabbath day."

Miss Upton deigned no reply to this, and silence reigned in the tent. And the pure beauty of the Sabbath morning lingered all

about them, without awakening one recognizing thought of the Father's love and care.

After this interruption, the girls went back to their reading. Miss Upton had not once thought to bring her Bible, but she had remembered to put a pleasing novel in her trunk. So now she turned her attention to "The Bride of an Evening," and her eyes grew misty with tears over the trials of the imaginary hero; but not one thought had she for "The chiefest among ten thousand; the One altogether lovely,"—the grand hero of Calvary and the Cross. In imagination she could go with the hero of her romance to his prison cell, and fancy him innocently suffering for the guilty, with heroic calmness and fortitude. But she would have yawned over, and pronounced extremely dull, the sublimely pathetic story of the Kingly One,—"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; and with his stripes are we healed."

Did Miss Upton believe her Bible? Why, she would have been extremely shocked if you had asked her the question. And yet, how *could* she believe it, and not venerate the grandeur of the self-sacrifice portrayed in its wonderful pages?

Meantime, Edna was holding a little conversation with herself. "I just believe I'll do it!" she said. "It will be *such* fun to see the girls stare. *They* think Elmer Worthington handsome! Pooh, the perfumed wax doll. I wonder what they'll say when they see a *real*, genuine *man*."

After this she scribbled rapidly, and when her letter was finished, it contained an urgent invitation for Dr. Gordon to visit their camp. Now, it so happened that he had not taken his usual summer vacation, and he found it quite easy to persuade himself that he needed rest. So it came to pass, a few days later, that Edna dressed herself with unusual care. Whereupon Mabel exclaimed:

"Why Pussie Byford, what *are* you rigging up so for?"

Edna laughed.

"I'm going up to town," she said, gayly, "to show the benighted grangers what real city style is."

"Going to town! What for?" said Miss Faircourt, opening her eyes wide with astonishment.

"In search of my fortune," returned Edna. "Maybe I'll find it, and bring it home with me. Who knows? Well, I'm off."

And she went her way, leaving behind her a curious trio of girls.

"Is she going *alone?*" questioned Miss Upton, in great surprise.

"What of it?" said Mabel, lightly. She always took the side opposite to Miss Upton, in any controversy. "I'm not *sure*, but I *think* Pussie Byford is capable of taking care of herself."

"Humph!" Miss Upton said, settling back, and turning her attention to her book.

As for Edna, she was supremely indifferent to their comments, as she walked through the sunlit-woods, singing little snatches of song, by way of company. At the door of the depot she hesitated for an instant, seized by a sudden, bashful dismay. But she quickly banished it, by saying: "Who cares? There wasn't anyone else to come." And in two minutes more, she was shaking hands with Dr. Gordon.

"I was *so* afraid you wouldn't come," she said, cordially.

But what she had wanted him to come *for*, was certainly a mystery. Surely not because she thought he would find congenial company in their party.

"You didn't think I *could* resist such an urgent invitation?" he asked, with a bright smile.

"I'm afraid you'll be sorry," she said, in a doubtful tone; "we're an awful wild set."

He looked at her,—a look half serious, half amused.

"What is your definition of the word 'wild'?" he asked, quietly.

"Why, you see," she explained, "we believe in having a good time; and—well—really, I don't think we care for much else."

Dr. Gordon winced a little. Strange words these, from his chosen helpmeet. Nevertheless, he said, pleasantly,—

"What is your idea of a good time? I am quite curious to know."

Edna regarded him in wondering silence for a moment, before she answered,—

"Of course, you won't agree with me, if I tell you."

"Why not?" he asked, gently.

"Oh, *you* don't think *anything* is nice, but preaching and praying," she replied, flushing and laughing.

"Ah!" he said, wishing, yet hardly daring, to contradict this assertion.

"The indecision apparent in his manner roused all the latent mischief in her nature, and she sang, lightly,—

"'*I* like music, and dancing, and a chat with the beaux.'"

"And does that satisfy you?" he asked earnestly.

She flashed up at him a bright, bewildering glance, before she answered,—

"*To-day*, I am perfectly content."

And then they came within sight of the camp.

"Who under the sun is that with Pussie Byford?" said Mabel, looking up as they approached.

"He looks, for all the world, like a minister!" exclaimed Miss Faircourt.

"A minister!" echoed Miss Upton. "What an *idea!*"

And before they had recovered from their astonishment, Edna was introducing them to Dr. Gordon.

Of course, his presence in the neighborhood soon became noised abroad. And, in due course of time, the officers of various churches

in the town went in a body to see him,—having previously decided that a union-meeting in the grove would, of all things, be the most desirable.

So it came to pass, on the following Sabbath, that, "as the mountain would not go to Mohammed, Mohammed went to the mountain," and our party found themselves, with other worshipers, in the leafy temple. Gloriously beautiful shone the summer sun, and gayly each feathered songster chirped its matin song of praise. In perfect keeping seemed the sunlight, and the birds, with the honest, browned faces of the sturdy farmers. But elegantly out of place,—as some bright-plumaged, tropical bird, among the staid old trees,—appeared our beruffled, befrizzled party; and all of the early part of that glorious Sabbath morning had been frittered away in deciding what to wear.

"Really, girls," Edna had said, standing with her head inclined to one side, trying to

decide between the merits of a creamy nun's-veiling, trimmed with yards upon yards of costly lace, and a summer silk, of exquisite make and finish. "I think it is a positive duty for us to give these country people some fashionable enlightenment. Why, the last time I was in town I actually saw one of them in a sun-bonnet."

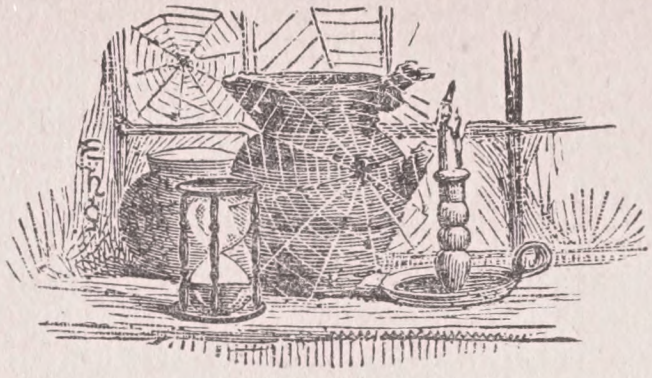
She did not further say that this rustic head-gear crowned a head of silvery hair. And hair and bonnet framed a face placid and sweet as an angel's.

"*I* shall wear my traveling dress," Ella Faircourt said, decidedly. "I don't think a meeting in the woods calls for anything more dressy."

"But white is *always* suitable," Edna replied, refolding the silk.

As for Miss Upton, she said nothing, but went on calmly arraying herself in a black silk, suited perfectly for Dr. Lock's fashionable church, but decidedly inappropriate for a rural temple of trees.

As a consequence of all this fussing and fixing, the last echo of the last bell had died away, before they were ready; and Dr. Gordon had risen to announce his text, before they pressed their way through the crowd to a seat.



CHAPTER XV.

THE speaker's stand was beneath the wide-spreading branches of a stately tree, its green leaves forming an arch of ideal beauty. From this vantage-ground, Dr. Gordon looked down upon the sea of eager, expectant faces. And standing thus, without desk, or book, or manuscript, he was the most commanding, oratorical figure that could be conceived. A sympathetic murmur of welcome ran through the promiscuous assembly when he rose; then absolute silence settled over them, as he said,—

"'Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.'"

And perhaps it was not intentional, but his eyes met Edna's as he spoke. I will not attempt to tell you what he said further. The words of his text sufficed to carry Edna back to the day of the boat-ride.

Then, for the first and only time, she had been face to face with Death. She had felt his terrible, remorseless grasp, and been afraid, oh *so afraid*, of his awful presence. And here Dr. Gordon was, warning them that at any hour, yea, at any moment, the death-angel might come.

Not for her? Why, it couldn't be possible he would come for *her*,—so young, so full of life! Surely he would think *her* quite unfit for the grave's cold solitude!

And yet, there was Marion Endicot, only eighteen, and the cards out for her *debut* party, when the grim messenger beckoned her away. And loving friends had been powerless to wrest her from his hold.

At this point, Dr. Gordon's voice arrested

her attention. Finely modulated, and full of pathos it was, as he repeated Mrs. Heman's beautiful poem,—

"Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north-wind's breath,
And stars to set,—but all,
Thou hast *all* seasons for thine own, O Death!

"We know when moons shall wane,
When summer-birds from far shall cross the sea,
When autumn's hue shall tinge the golden grain,—
But who shall teach us when to look for thee?

"Youth and the opening rose
May look like things too glorious for decay,
And smile at thee,—but thou art not of those
That wait the ripened bloom, to seize their prey."

The spell of the pathetic poem was all around them, when he added,—

"'Watch, therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.'"

And then, after a short, fervent prayer, he said,—

"Will the congregation join in singing 'Almost persuaded,'" and his splendid voice

led the great multitude in singing the tender, touching words,—

"Almost persuaded,
Come, come to-day;
Almost persuaded,
Turn not away."

On and on, through the clear, summer air, rolled the entreating strain,—

"Almost is but to fail!
Sad, sad, that bitter wail—
Almost—*but lost!*"

It would be impossible to describe the effect of that solemn sermon, with its supplement of sacred song. I think it would have been a relief to some of our party to have cried outright. As it was, Mabel Lester furtively wiped the tears from her eyes.

"*What* a sermon!" said some one behind them.

"I can't understand how anyone *can* halt between two opinions, after listening to such words as those," answered his nearest neighbor.

"Dr. Gordon has sown the seed, but *God* must give the increase," said a lady's clear, emphatic voice.

"I feel like going up and down through the audience, saying: 'Behold, *now* is the accepted time: *now* is the day of salvation,'" said still another, speaking earnestly.

The last speaker was a rusty-looking farmer, with hands browned by the sun, and lined, and interlined, with indelible marks of toil; his hair was not cut after the latest approved fashion, and certainly his coat was out of date; but his face, to a judge of character, belonged to one of nature's noblemen.

Miss Upton vouchsafed the common coat one scornful glance, then she actually drew her rich dress closer around her, as if she feared its contaminating touch.

"*Do* let us get out of this crowd," she said abruptly.

It was a subdued and quiet party that gathered together in the evening twilight. For a

time they watched the soft light of sunset mingle with the grave tints of even-tide in silence, broken only by the plaintive cries of the whip-poor-wills, or the "To-whit! to-whoo!" of some distant owl.

"I declare, Sis," Charlie Byford said, ruefully, "that parson of yours has given me the blues."

Mr. Worthington scowled.

"Nothing could tempt me to listen to another such sermon," he said, testily. "Ugh! I feel as if I had been to my own funeral."

"Be *ye* also ready," quoted Edna, half in jest, half in earnest.

"My dear Miss Byford," he protested, "spare me!"

"The *idea* of trying to *frighten* people into religion!" Miss Upton said, indignantly. "For my part, I don't scare easily."

"No, neither do I. Not if I know myself," said Mr. Driscol, sharply.

"But, shouldn't you be afraid to die?"

It was Mabel who asked this startling question.

"To die!" repeated Miss Upton, astonished out of her usual self-complacency.

"I suppose we've *all got* to die *sometime*," Mabel said, at length.

"How perfectly doleful we *are* getting," said Edna.

"Everything will seem different to-morrow—by daylight," said Miss Upton, with cheerful re-assurance.

"I should hope so!" cried Mabel.

"Why don't you boys say something cheerful?" asked Edna, irritably.

"What do you all say to a hop at the Lake House to-morrow evening?" said Mr. Worthington.

"I second that motion," answered Charlie Byford.

"Almost *anything* will be preferable to moping this way," added Miss Upton.

"By the way, we musn't forget to invite

Dr. Gordon," said Mr. Sterling, looking mischievously at Edna. "We owe him a return compliment, you know."

They all laughed.

Edna neither assented nor dissented, but she *thought*, "The *idea* of inviting Dr. Gordon to a dancing-party."

"Let's make it a full-dress affair," she said, presently. "It will be *such* fun to see the country people stare."

"Might know Pussie would think of *dress*, first thing," Miss Faircourt said, laughing.

"I am just dying to show them my pink crêpe," returned Edna.

"Surely you won't wear *that!*" said Miss Upton.

"Indeed I *shall*," Edna replied, "that's what I want it a full-dress affair for."

"Full-dress it shall be!" declared Mr. Worthington." I'll step over to the office and dispatch for flowers, and any extra finery any of you may need to make it a swell party."

"*I* don't need a thing," Edna said, coolly. "Mamma always packs one complete evening dress in my trunk; 'in case of an emergency,' she says."

"*I* didn't come prepared for anything but *fun*," said Mabel, almost crossly, "so I'll have to make out a list."

"I think it's *too ridiculous*," said Miss Faircourt, "but if the rest of you do, I suppose I'll have to," and she began to scribble rapidly.

And did Dr. Gordon's earnest, warning words fall to the ground, powerless?

Nay, verily. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please,

and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

Now, it so happened that Dr. Gordon did not receive his invitation. Indeed, he knew nothing of the party till late in the evening. Early that Monday morning, a messenger came for Rev. Mr. Cleavland. Old Father Goodspeed was dying, and fain would hear the voice of prayer once more before he crossed the river. But Mr. Cleavland was writhing under the torture of a violent sick-headache.

"Perhaps Dr. Gordon will go," he said, wearily.

"Yes, I'm *sure* he will," he added, confidently, and he hastily penciled a few lines to him.

Of course Dr. Gordon was ready and willing to go, and thus it was that he remained in blissful ignorance of the prospective dancing-party.

Very near the end of his earthly pilgrimage was Father Goodspeed. In a little time his

dim eyes would see the King, in all his beauty; and his ears,—almost insensible to earthly sound,—would hear the welcome words, "Well done thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

When Dr. Gordon entered the sick room, those about the bedside motioned him forward. The sick man's eyes unclosed, and his lips moved, but no sound escaped them.

"He wants you to pray," his daughter whispered.

Then Dr. Gordon dropped on his knees, and, with earnest, up-reaching faith, raised the dying man to the Father's strong, upholding arms. A smile of seraphic joy illumined the aged face as Dr. Gordon arose, and he murmured, softly,—

"'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me.'"

Then he slept again; and the day wore on, and waned, and evening shadows gathered

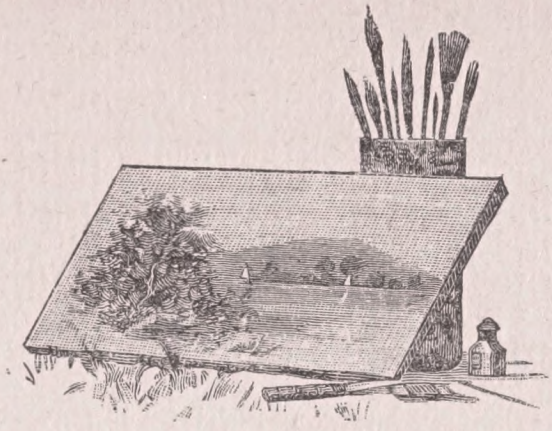
about the silent watchers before he spoke again. It was toward the evening's close when he wakened suddenly, and looked round upon his family and friends.

"'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,'" he said, softly.

Then, overcome by the sleep that knows no waking, he closed his eyes, and presently Dr. Gordon left the family alone with their dead. The silvery harvest-moon hung in mid-heavens when he came to the hotel, and strangely out of keeping with his solemn thoughts seemed the strains of light music that floated out to meet him. Through the brilliantly lighted, open windows, he could see the revelers; and he paused, involuntarily, when he recognized the face of his betrothed wife. He took in at a glance the costume of the fair girl before him,—her bare, white arms and neck, her flushed, ardent face, even the flowers upon her bosom, stamped themselves indelibly upon his mind. Mr. Worthington's flowing beard min-

gled with her sunny hair, as they circled round, and round, in the mazy waltz, and his face wore an expression of passionate yearning that made Dr. Gordon's usually pale face flush hotly. Then he went away to his room, with a heavy heart. He smiled, a sad little smile, when he read his invitation, and said softly, to himself: "'God is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God.' I can not doubt but he will bring her to himself."

But little he knew how different *God's* way would be from *his*, in bringing about the desired result.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE following week ran its rapid course. Every day Dr. Gordon saw Edna, more or less alone; but she had a way of suddenly summoning a third party when he attempted any serious conversation that completely baffled him. She was sweetness itself when with him, but he could never keep her with him long at a time.

Once she was betrayed into conversing earnestly; but just at that moment Mr. Worthington came upon them suddenly, and she instantly assailed him with a perfect battery of senseless small-talk.

All taken together, Dr. Gordon and Mr. Worthington were two thoroughly uncomforta-

ble beings. Mr. Worthington, on his part, cordially hated Dr. Gordon, and after this particular encounter he went moodily away by himself, muttering,

"The canting hypocrite! I'll win her yet. No power on earth can prevent me."

As for Dr. Gordon, he longed, with unutterable longing, to snatch this brand from the burning; and his prayers grew almost impatient in their intensity. A thousand jealous fears and fancies tormented him, that he laid resolutely down one moment, only to take up again the next. He firmly believed that God, in his own good time, and way, would lead Edna to himself; nevertheless, if God's time could only be *his*—if just *now*, he could "see of the travail of his soul," then, indeed, he should be satisfied. But, for some unexplained reason, God's way is seldom quite our way. And greatly surprised would Dr. Gordon have been, could he have looked behind the scenes, and seen the wonderful army of

events even then marching on toward the fulfillment of his petition.

So, according to His own will—not any human plan—God works out his own design for you and me.

> "And if, through patient toil, we reach the land
> Where tired feet, with sandals loosed, may rest,—
> Where we shall clearly know, and understand,—
> I think that we will say, 'God knew the best.'"

A few days later, Dr. Gordon went home, and that same evening Edna received a letter from her father. Now, it was not wonderful that Mr. Byford should write to his daughter; but usually he left the family correspondence to his wife,—as he did most things pertaining to his children,—and important indeed must he have deemed his message, or he would not have done so unusual a thing.

Edna's face flushed with surprise as she read her letter.

"Humph!" she said aloud. "The idea! Whatever possessed papa to write such a letter?"

Saying which, she glanced again over one paragraph.

"Mr. Worthington seems sincere in his proposal; and it will relieve me of much anxiety to know that your future is well provided for," thus ran the letter.

Edna frowned ominously as she refolded her letter; and sorely did she try Mr. Worthington's patience from that time. He had hoped much from these weeks of unrestrained intimacy, and he felt thoroughly vexed and discomfited when the camp broke up, a week later, and he took his seat by the capricious little lady's side on their return trip.

About that time, Nelson Keith paced slowly up and down the veranda, in the summer twilight. Mrs. Keith sat near the low, open window, her finger between the leaves of the book she had been reading. But evidently her son's presence, at that moment, was more interesting than Robertson's Living Thoughts.

"Mother," Nelson said, presently, "I have

made up my mind it is time I began my life-work."

"And that is your profession?" Mrs. Keith said, thoughtfully.

"Yes," he replied, sitting down on an ottoman in front of her, and taking the book from her hand. "I know of no profession — not even the ministry—that offers so wide a field of labor."

"Yes," she said, earnestly, "a Christian physician's influence is almost boundless. Blessed indeed are those to whom he comes, armed with prayer. I feel sincere pity for the homes over which the dark-winged angel seems hovering, where the stricken ones hang anxiously on every look, and word, of a worldly, Godless doctor. Whereas, I congratulate the pain-racked patient whose room is hallowed by the presence of a physician who relies, in every emergency, upon the Strong for strength.

"I almost tremble when I think of assum-

ing such solemn responsibilities," he answered, gravely.

"If you entered upon this work depending upon your own strength, I should indeed be fearful," Mrs. Keith said, gently.

And Nelson Keith's face was aglow with earnest feeling, as he answered,—

"'Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength.'"

"'Happy is he that *hath* the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God,'" Mrs. Keith answered, softly.

A little silence fell between them then, broken abruptly by Nelson, saying,—

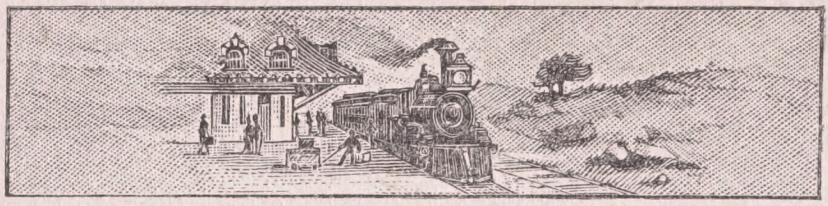
"I think Chicago offers as wide a field for usefulness as I could desire."

So it came to pass, a few weeks later, that a modest sign, bearing the inscription, "N. E. Keith, M.D.," gave notice that he would gladly alleviate the distress of suffering humanity. And the way was opened,—as it usually is

in the line of duty,—and hither and thither flew the busy doctor, often returning to his office wearied beyond expression.

Dainty and home-like was this same richly carpeted, elegantly furnished office,—or inner sanctum,—where, times without number, Dr. Keith consulted with the "Great Physician."

People spoke of him as a wonderful doctor. Indeed, they pronounced his cures quite marvelous. At which he smiled quietly, saying, within himself, "'I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.'"



CHAPTER XVII.

THE late summer and early autumn sped away, and the first snow-flakes found "our set" fully launched upon the tide of winter gayety.

More and more unsatisfactory were Edna's letters, and finally Dr. Gordon decided to visit her. So, one winter evening, he walked briskly up Michigan avenue and presently reached the Byford mansion. He mounted the steps, two at a time, and rang the bell. Noiselessly the massive door swung upon its hinges, and a moment later he found himself in the elegant drawing-room, waiting for Edna's appearance. If he had expected her to run with lover-like haste to meet him, he was doomed to disappointment. An hour—perhaps more—passed, and then she swept into the room in full evening dress, her diamonds scintillating dazzlingly

in the gaslight. White and bare were her neck, and shoulders, and arms, on which the costly gems glittered, and she stood before him like a beautiful temptress, making the young blood leap wildly through his veins. Like some fierce whirlwind,—that sways the giant oak, yet leaves it steadfast,—the momentary emotion passed; leaving in its place a horror, that *his* promised wife could be thus capable of rousing unhallowed thoughts.

All the while he was asking and answering kindly questions of greeting, his thoughts ran on: "No wonder vice walks abroad with brazen face, when high bred, cultured women make themselves a target for lustful eyes, and drive men to the verge of madness with their seductive wiles! I suppose she will waltz to-night, folded in some senseless idiot's arms."

And this last thought impelled him—perhaps unwisely—to say, suddenly, "O, Edna, I wish I had the right to say something to you."

"Perhaps you have," she said, looking up shyly.

"I am afraid you will be offended, he said, doubtfully, "but do you know, I wish you would go up-stairs and put on another dress."

"Another dress!" she repeated, looking at him in dazed astonishment.

"Cover your neck and arms with something! anything!—that's what I mean," he went on, desperately.

"Absurd!" she said, laughing outright, and coolly surveying herself in a full-length mirror. "Why, Worth exhausted his skill when he designed this dress; and now you don't admire it! Now, Mr. Worthington will say it is *exquisite*," she rattled on.

Dr. Gordon surveyed her from head to foot, with a perplexed air.

"I don't know how to express what I want to say," he said at last. "The dress is certainly beautiful—"

"You are willing to admit that much," she interrupted, with a toss of her dainty head.

"But,—I should not want a sister of mine to wear it," he added, with gentle decision. "I beg your pardon for saying so, but as I commenced by being frank, I may as well continue."

He stopped, and seemed to give Edna a chance to answer; but she stood perfectly still before him, and he added, kindly, "I don't think fashionable young ladies pause to consider the magnitude of their power. Why, my dear child, there is *no limit* to a woman's influence!"

Edna laughed,—a teasing, bewitching laugh. "Now you are preaching at me," she said, in the voice of a petulant child.

Just then a servant handed her a card, immediately followed by Mr. Worthington, and Dr. Gordon arose, and bowed distantly; then Edna accompanied him to the door.

"I'm sorry I had an engagement for this evening," she said, regretfully.

"Yes, *I* am sorry," he answered, taking her

little hand in his. "Good night, my darling. God bless you!" And then he pressed one quick kiss on her lips—the first since their betrothal—and left her.

"What a solemn-looking fellow that is!" said Mr. Worthington, sneeringly, when Edna re-entered the room. "I'd awfully hate to be pious, if it would make me look like him."

"No fear of it," returned Edna, decidedly. "There isn't the least danger." And actually he didn't know whether she intended a compliment, or not.

As for Dr. Gordon, he went out from her presence with weakened faith. And why? Because God was doing his own work, in his own good time, and way? Ah me! If Christians could only realize how wise, and kind, and watchful the Father is, would they distrust him so?

An hour later, Edna was mingling with a crowd where her dress was not the exception, but the rule; and the only comment it ex-

cited was, "Perfectly lovely!" "Charming!" "Too sweet for anything!" and so on. Surely, amid this adulation the little lady would have been quite unwilling to admit that Dr. Gordon's earnest words made her uncomfortable, and notice—for the first time with disgust—the fixed look of admiration some of the young dudes gave her.

"Upon my word, I'd like to stand in Worthington's shoes," she overheard one say, to another, as they glided by to strains of rapturous music.

She shrank away from him then, but, emboldened by the witching motion, and voluptuous music, he drew her closer to him. And presently he led her to the cool conservatory, for rest. Softly beautiful sounded the music in that tropical retreat, and the very air about them seemed propitious for the words of passionate love that Mr. Worthington was prepared to utter.

The color flooded Edna's face as she listened,

with down-cast eyes; then there was a flash of diamonds as Mr. Worthington withdrew Dr. Gordon's precious symbol of union from her finger, and replaced it with his own costlier gift. He did not say they would walk "Heavenward,"—oh no, a mansion of stone and mortar was quite sufficient for him. And not once did he remember that "here have we no continuing city."

"Please return this, with my compliments," he said, smiling triumphantly, as he handed her the discarded ring.

And the first pink tints of early morning tinged the eastern sky, before Edna had finished a letter to Dr. Gordon, that ran thus:

DR. GORDON:

My Dear Friend—For I shall always think of you as such—I have not the courage to say to you the words that I must write. In justice to both of us, I have decided to tell you that I think it is best for our engagement to end.

I enclose the ring you so kindly gave me, hoping you will find a much worthier woman to wear it than

Your sincere friend,

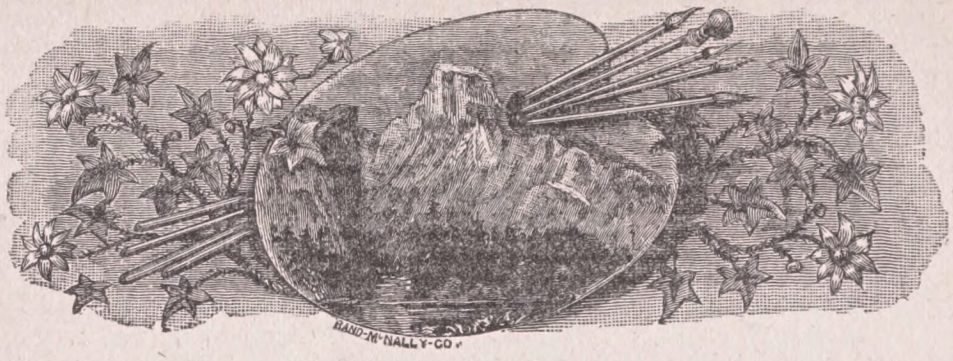
EDNA BYFORD.

With great rejoicing was the news of Edna's later engagement received by the Byford family. The shade, fast becoming habitual to Mr. Byford's face, visibly lightened, and Charlie expressed his approbation in no measured terms.

"I'll be hanged, Sis, if I ain't glad!" said he. "Gordon may be well enough, but he isn't one of *our* sort. I never felt at home with him."

Edna's lip curled contemptuously when she heard this remark. Poor child! With eyes wide open, she had walked into the golden net, and now her unwary feet were tangled in its meshes.

And how did Dr. Gordon receive the news? He read the short letter with a little start of surprise; then he looked at the tiny circlet,—so jeweled with precious memories of a sainted mother,—then over his earnest, manly face flashed an unspeakable thankfulness; and he bowed his head upon the open letter saying: "My Father, I thank thee for this wonderful deliverance."



CHAPTER XVIII.

MERRILY went on the preparations for Edna's marriage. Within the Byford mansion, Dame Fashion reigned supreme; and Dame Rumor's tongue found a prolific theme for gossip in the wonderful trousseau of the prospective bride.

"Pussie means to die game," said Mabel Lester, having caught the slang phrase from her brother.

"She means to ruin her father," replied Miss Upton, "if reports are true."

"I *do* believe all the child is getting married for, is to have an elegant trousseau," chimed in Ella Faircourt.

"Elmer Worthington just worships her," Mabel said, thoughtfully.

"He adores her pretty face," responded Ella Faircourt, scornfully.

Miss Upton shrugged her shoulders.

"That's about all there is to her," she said, in her cool, contemptuous way. "She always makes me think of a fashion-plate."

"I guess she'll set the fashion in wedding-dresses," returned Mabel. "Why, they do say if hers was made of bank bills it couldn't have cost more."

"I think such foolish extravagance is *ridiculous*," answered Miss Upton. Saying which, she arose, and deftly shook out her voluminous drapery.

"There's one consolation," said Mabel, gayly, "as her bridesmaids, we shall all share her honors."

"Humph!" said Miss Upton.

And then Miss Faircourt and Miss Upton walked away together.

Meantime, Mr. Byford was growing haggard and careworn. The great financial crisis,

that for months had menaced the mercantile world, was approaching its culmination. One after another, strong houses had gone down, burying weaker ones beneath their hopeless ruin. And now, the stately house of Byford & Co. was tottering to its very foundation. No wonder then—with sleepless nights, and harrassed days—Mr. Byford began to feel the continued strain. But quite oblivious of his perplexity was Mrs. Byford, who dreamed her rose-tinted, fanciful dreams, unconscious of the coming storm.

Perhaps it was as well, however, for quite powerless would she have been to prevent the impending catastrophe, and the dreadful uncertainty attending a calamity is often far harder to bear than the disaster itself.

In happy unconsciousness of any monetary embarrassment, Mrs. Byford presented herself in her husband's private office, pocket-book in hand.

"I want a check for a thousand dollars, my dear," she said, carelessly.

Her husband drew in his feet, and looked at her, without speaking.

"Don't keep me waiting, that's a darling," she went on, good-naturedly. "I'm to meet Edna at Field's at ten, and"—pulling out her watch—"why, my goodness, it only lacks one minute of ten now!"

"I could let you have a check for a thousand cents better than so many dollars," Mr. Byford said, dismally.

"Now, Erasmus, *don't* croak!" This in an impatient tone. "And I'm in *such* a hurry, too. Edna, dear child, will think I've forgotten her."

Mr. Byford proceeded to make out the check, muttering, meanwhile, to himself, "I'll indulge them as long as I can. I don't suppose it will make much difference in the end." He handed it to her, saying, seriously,—

"You must make it go as far as possible, Edie; times are awful hard just now."

"That's just what men *always* say,"

laughed Mrs. Byford. Then she went triumphantly to the waiting carriage.

"O, mamma, whatever *did* make you so late?" was Edna's petulant greeting.

Mrs. Byford smiled indulgently.

"It's *too* ridiculous," said she, "but your pa hesitated some time before he gave me a check. And do you know, he actually cautioned me about spending it!"

"The *idea!*" cried Edna, incredulously.

At this point they reached the lace-counter; and forthwith the gentlemanly clerk displayed his richest goods.

"I assure you, this over-dress is cheap at five hundred," said he, in his blandest tones, holding up for their inspection a garment that might have been woven in a spider's loom, so delicate was it in texture.

"It is perfectly lovely!" said Edna.

And then a few final words exchanged one-half the check for the useless article.

Two hours later, Mrs. Byford leaned wearily back in her carriage.

"Oh dear," sighed she, "how money *does* run away. And I have hardly got one thing I intended to get."

"What's the use of fussing about it?" Edna answered, pertly. "That over-dress is too sweet for anything; and I guess there's more money where that came from."

The consequence was, that the following day Mrs. Byford again besieged her husband for money.

"Probably it will be the last we shall feel obliged to do for Edna," she said, knowing that his petted daughter was his most vulnerable point.

Of course he yielded, but he sighed wearily as he scrawled his name on the required paper.

About that time the Worthington family were seated at the dinner-table.

"By the way, Elmer," began Mr. Worthington, "that father-in-law of yours wanted me to indorse notes to the amount of five hundred

thousand this morning. Rather presuming on his chance of relationship, wasn't it?"

Did you accommodate him?" Elmer asked, trying to appear composed.

"Hardly," said Mr. Worthington, leisurely sipping his champagne. "It is against the rules of our house. And besides, I don't think Byford & Co. will weather the storm."

"Ah!" said Elmer, anxiously, "Is it so bad as that?"

"Yes," returned Mr. Worthington, gravely. "I wish you was well out of your scrape with the daughter."

The flush on Elmer's face deepened, and he answered, haughtily,—

"I'm not marrying the girl's *money*."

At this point Mrs. Worthington and her daughter exchanged significant glances, and Miss Nellie added her voice to the discussion.

"Nevertheless," she said, smiling incredulously, "you wouldn't have thought of her if she'd been poor."

Elmer bit his lip with vexation, and answered, sharply,—

"*Your* opinion has not been asked on the subject, but I don't mind telling you that I consider Miss Byford's *face* a fortune in itself."

Miss Nellie laughed sarcastically.

"What *you* can see so remarkable about her, is more than *I* can see."

"*You* look at her through green glasses," retorted Elmer.

"What's the use in quarreling over the girl?" queried Mr. Worthington. "But I tell you, my boy, if things are as bad as I think they are, she will be penniless. And—really—a pretty face is hardly worth the price you intend to pay."

"Notwithstanding, I think I shall risk the price," Elmer answered, trying to smile.

Meantime, fire, and flood, and shipwreck, and manifold complications—beyond his power to prevent—conspired together. Extravagance

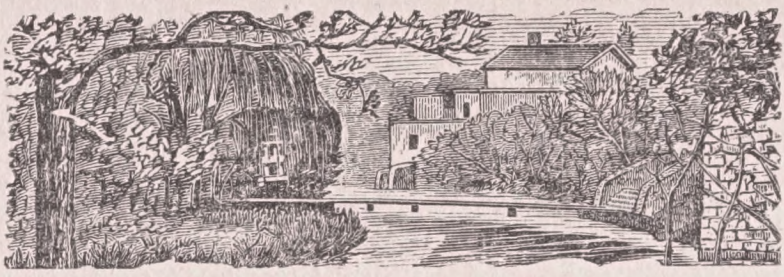
at home, and treachery abroad, added their mite to swell the current bearing Mr. Byford on to destruction. He had caught at his daughter's engagement—and ultimate marriage—with the only son of Mr. Worthington, senior partner in the princely firm of Worthington, Steele & Co., something as a drowning man would clutch at a straw, hoping thereby to gain sufficient influence to bridge the yawning chasm. But the last plank had crumbled beneath his feet. What, then, was he to do?

Ah, many and many a man has gone down into the depths of financial ruin, leaning on the "Strong Arm," and from the turbid waters has brought precious treasure of faith, made strong by fiery trial, and friendship proved and true, and family ties cemented and strengthened, by the trying test. But no such support had Mr. Byford. He had built his house upon the treacherous sand, and the floods had come, and winds were battering it down.

At last there came a day, when he came home, and went straight to his library, and securely locked the door. Then up and down its length he paced, like some caged animal, muttering fiercely,—

"I'm a ruined man! Utterly, irretrievably ruined!"

Wearied at length with walking, he sank into a chair, bowed his head upon his clenched hands, and wept great scalding tears of agony. Ah me! If, instead of this useless lamentation, he had said within his heart, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him," and, thus saying, he had faced the worst, with brave, true courage, what agony his family would have been spared. Instead of this, however, he raised his head and cast a furtive look around the room. Then, with desperate firmness, he drew a pistol from a drawer beside him, and a moment later its loud report startled Mrs. Byford from her afternoon nap, and brought the servants, pale and terrified, to the awful scene.



CHAPTER XIX.

WAS it a chance happening, or a guiding of the unseen Hand, that made Dr. Keith drive by at that particular moment? Be this as it may, into the wild confusion he came,—calm, self-possessed, almost divinely kind. Near the door,—in a little curled-up, senseless heap,—lay Edna, while Mrs. Byford paced the floor, wringing her hands in wild, hysterical sorrow.

"O, Doctor, save him!" she cried, springing to meet him.

But even as she spoke, his quick, professional eye saw that Mr. Byford was beyond all human aiding.

Infinitely gentle was the voice that answered, solemnly,—

"My dear madam, he is beyond our care."

With a wild shriek, Mrs. Byford knelt beside her dead. Dr. Keith gently raised Edna in his arms.

"Show me the way to Miss Byford's room," he said to a white-faced servant, and without further ceremony he carried her thither.

"Loosen her clothes," he directed, "and give her plenty of air; she will recover consciousness soon enough.

And a moment later he was saying to Mrs. Byford, in a low, even-toned voice,—that rarely failed to quiet Dr. Keith's most fractious patients,—

"Your daughter needs you, Mrs. Byford; let me take you to her."

"Edna, my poor darling!" she sobbed; and, with gentle firmness, he drew her away from the awful spectacle, and curious, gaping crowd.

At this point, Charlie burst breathlessly into the room.

"Good heavens, Doctor, it *can't* be true!" he cried, in a frenzy of horror.

Dr. Keith simply bowed his head.

Charlie glanced at the rigid, sheeted form before him, and shuddered.

"It is *too* terrible," he said. Then, heedless of the staring throng, he sank into the same chair, and leaned his head upon the same table, where his father had wept his last vain regrets, and his bowed form shook with uncontrollable anguish.

For a brief time, Dr. Keith let the natural emotion have its way. But as he waited, his voiceless prayer ascended, and when he spoke, his voice was magnetized by Him who wept sympathizing tears with those who mourned.

"My poor boy!" he said, at last, "for your mother's and sister's sake, you must try to bear this trial manfully.

"Poor mother! Poor Edna!" groaned Charlie.

"I am going to them now; will you come with me?"

He linked his arm in Charlie's as he spoke,

and led him to the room where Edna and her mother wept together. It was a scene oftentimes repeated, yet ever sad, ever new,—a wife and daughter yielding to their first abandonment of grief. And what consolation could Dr. Keith give them? Could he speak to them of the bright, eternal morning, when they might hope to meet their lost loved one? Could he tell them that "*their* loss was *his* gain?" Ah me! Ah me! Death is unutterably sad,—the long parting, unspeakably dreary,—even in Christian homes. What, then, must it be where the Savior's love does not lighten the grave's dark gloom? Oh, happy those who can bow submissively, and kiss the chastening rod!

Softly, Dr. Keith and Charlie entered the room, and Edna, looking up, knew for the first time that "the doctor," so often alluded to, was Dr. Keith.

"Oh, Dr. Keith! I am *so* glad it is you!" she said, somewhat incoherently. And to her

heart there came an assurance that they had a tower of strength to lean upon.

Presently she said,—

"Dr. Keith: my mother."

Very few words he had to offer; yet in every look, and tone, was manifest his tenderest sympathy.

"Believe me," he said gently, as he arose to go, "'He doth not afflict willingly.'"

But upon deaf ears fell the message.

"My husband, oh my husband!" was Mrs. Byford's plaintive wail.

And Dr. Keith turned to Charlie, saying,—

"Have you any message that you would like me to give to any of your friends?"

Charlie turned to Edna.

"Perhaps, Sis, you ought to send some word to Mr. Worthington."

The blood rolled in rich waves over Edna's face, and she quickly answered,—

"Of course he'll hear of it. *Everyone* will." And then the ready tears choked her utterance.

So Charlie gave the final directions, and Dr. Keith went his way to visit other houses, where they were eagerly waiting for him. And sure enough, "everybody" *did* hear of the awful event. The evening papers seized upon the thrilling item of news, and headed the column, "Terrible tragedy in high life." And the thousand and one friends of the family discussed it over their tea, and wondered what they *would* do *now;* and whether Elmer Worthington would be such an idiot as to marry a beggar.

"I don't see what they *will* do," said Mr. Worthington, meditatively. "They haven't a dollar they can call their own."

"Of course, Elmer, you won't mix yourself up with such a scandal!" interrupted Miss Nellie.

At which Elmer gave her a scathing glance, and left the room, without speaking.

Meanwhile, out upon the moon-lit air floated the dismal crape, while within the dimly-

lighted mansion the little stricken family huddled together in a room as remote as possible from the library. People passed and repassed the house; gazed curiously at the darkened windows; wondered in which room the remains of Mr. Byford lay, how the family felt, what their future plans would be, if there would be a large attendance at the funeral, and so on, through the endless round of speculation usually indulged in at such times. Various were the comments made—charitable, and otherwise—on the surviving members of the family. But, truth to tell, the latter predominated.

"They're a brainless, extravagant set," said one gruff individual. "I wouldn't give the snap of my finger for any one of them."

Nevertheless, many were the cards of condolence received the following day. Among them, one from Elmer Worthington. Full of indecision, and doubt, was he, poor man! And then, he abominated tears,—faces are not

apt to be at their best when swollen and discolored by weeping,—so, after much deliberation, he concluded to wait until they were calmer. Meanwhile, he contented himself by ordering a costly floral emblem—a broken column, with the word "rest" at its base—to be sent the day of the funeral. Having done this, he shut himself up in his room, and cursed the fate that had thwarted his wishes.

As for Mrs. Byford, after the first few hours, she had hardly time to indulge in natural grief. Madam Dunbar came, and endless were the discussions in regard to necessary mourning.

"I want everything of the very *best*," said Mrs. Byford, decisively.

"But,—the very best is *very* expensive," ventured Madam.

Mrs. Byford looked amazed.

"And what of that?" she said, almost sharply.

Madam thought of the exorbitant, unpaid bill; but it was no time to speak of it. And

then, things might not be as bad as represented; so she answered, quite humbly,—

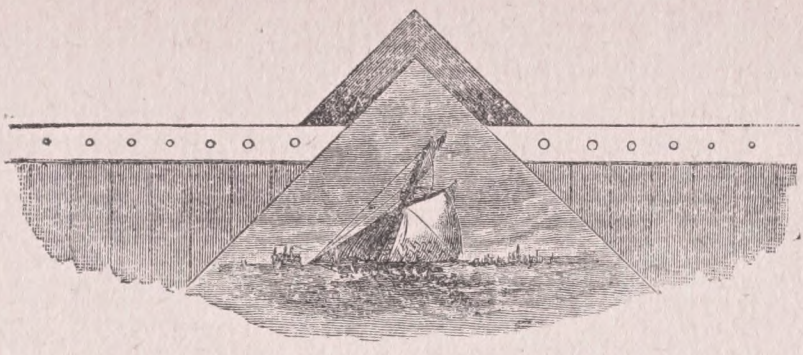
"Excuse me; I think I understand your wishes."

So it came to pass that, equal in richness to the bridal trosseau, was the mourning outfit.

At length the day of the funeral came, and the spacious drawing-room was crowded with the *élite* of the city. In his elegant, silver-mounted, velvet-palled casket, reposed Mr. Byford, surrounded by a wealth of pure, waxen bloom. But what cared he for the vain display and pomp? Indeed, it seemed almost a mockery, to surround him with emblems of peace, and faith, and victory.

"Earth to earth, dust to dust," said the minister.

Then down upon the flower-covered coffin rolled the cold clod, and all that was mortal of Mr. Byford, rested peacefully beneath it.



CHAPTER XX.

THE day after the funeral, Mr. Needham, legal adviser of Byford & Co., called. Now, strange as it may seem, Mrs. Byford was totally ignorant of the change in her husband's circumstances; so, when he expressed his deep regret at the unfortunate turn affairs had taken, she stared at him in blank amazement.

"Perhaps, Mr. Needham," Charlie said, quickly, "it would be better not to trouble mother with business details. If you will come with me to the library, I will give close attention to anything you have to say."

And now it was Mr. Needham's turn to look surprised,—so used was he to thinking of "young Byford" as a senseless fop. But

quite unlike the exquisite dude of his acquaintance, was the grave-faced, quietly-dressed young man before him.

"Why Charlie, *you* don't understand business!" Mrs. Byford said, incredulously.

"Perhaps I do, more than you give me credit for," he answered, quietly. "At any rate, I can learn. Shall we retire to the library, Mr. Needham?"

And with a brief "Excuse me, madam," Mr. Needham arose, and followed him thither.

As they entered the death-haunted room, Charlie was conscious of a little thrill of nervous, sickening dread. He quickly threw open the blinds and motioned Mr. Needham to a seat.

"Please begin at the begining, and tell me all," he said, with forced calmness.

Mr. Needham eyed him curiously, and to his inner self he said, "I am happily disappointed in him. There's more to him than I imagined. He may make a man yet, who knows?" Then he said, aloud:

"I declare, Byford, it's a bad affair, from beginning to end! I think your father must have been absolutely crazy, not to make any provision for his family outside of his business."

"I want to know the worst, and have done with it," Charlie responded.

"The worst?" burst forth Mr. Needham. "Why, my dear boy, you have not a dollar in the world that you can call your own!"

Charlie's pale face turned a shade paler, and his slender hand clenched the arm of his chair, until the finger-tips dented the firm leather cushion. Otherwise he was unmoved. "He shall never have it to say I acted like a whining boy," his thought was; and certainly of the two, the usually cool, collected lawyer showed the most emotion.

"What are the liabilities?" he questioned, briefly.

"Somewhere in the neighborhood of two hundred thousand, I should say."

"Of course the house will have to go, Charlie said, more to himself than Mr. Needham.

"Certainly. And if not, it takes money to keep up such an establishment."

"I don't care for myself," Charlie answered, hastily, "but it will be a crushing blow to mother and Edna."

"Your sister expects to marry soon, does she not?" questioned Mr. Needham.

A quick spasm of bitter pain crossed Charlie's face.

"It is impossible to tell. Probably not," he answered.

"Well," said Mr. Needham, rising, "if I can help you in any way, don't hesitate to call on me. Your father was an old friend, and I shall be most happy to assist his son in any way within my power." Saying which he departed, leaving Charlie alone with his wretchedness.

And to his dying hour that day would stand

out, in Charlie Byford's memory, distinct from any other day of his life. Hour after hour passed, as he went over, and over, the hopeless situation. And not one of "our set" did he think of, as likely to be of any service. But time and again, Dr. Keith's grave, strong face presented itself before him, until he said, decidedly:

"I will see him in the morning. If *anyone* can help me, *he* can. And now, I suppose, I must tell mother."

"Give up the house! Go into cheap apartments!" Mrs. Byford fairly screamed. "Charlie Byford, are you insane?"

Charlie sighed wearily. Poor boy! he so sorely needed upholding himself.

"I wish it was a delusion of the imagination," he answered, sadly, "but I am afraid it is too true."

"I wish I was dead!" cried Edna. "What *will* our set say?"

"If you only had been married before this

happened," sighed Mrs. Byford. "And you might have been, if you hadn't fooled your time away with that Dr. Gordon."

"Dr. Gordon wouldn't have deserted me at such a time as this," sobbed Edna.

And strange enough, at that moment a servant entered with a card. "Elmer C. Worthington," it read, and Edna ran lightly away to her room to re-arrange her toilet; while Mrs. Byford said, hopefully,—

"It may all come out right yet. Who knows?"

Mr. Worthington had worked himself into a perfect fever of heroism, and proposed an immediate, quiet marriage, with an extended trip abroad, for a wedding journey.

"It will all blow over in a year," he said, consolingly, thinking, meanwhile, that never, in her palmiest days, had his betrothed looked so charming, as in her unadorned robes of mourning.

"Let's see," he added, musingly," this is

Monday, and the *Europea* sails Saturday. We had better start for New York Thursday night."

"So soon?" cried Edna, in dismay.

"The sooner the better," he replied, "and after all, it will only be a few weeks sooner than we had planned. I will step round first thing in the morning and secure tickets," saying which, Mr. Worthington departed, and Edna went away to her bed, to dream of a happy deliverance from all her troubles.

But, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord." And, by ways that they know not, he leads his wandering children to himself.

The next morning, Edna awoke with parched lips, and throbbing head. Her limbs all ached, and every pulse-beat was a pain.

"O, mamma! I'm afraid I'm very sick," she cried, when Mrs. Byford came in to see her. "And if I am, I don't want anyone but Dr. Keith."

So, Dr. Keith was summoned, and grave indeed he looked when he saw his patient. In the hall below he met Mr. Worthington.

"Ah, Mr. Worthington, I was just wishing to see some friend of the family," he said, cordially. "You are engaged to Miss Byford, are you not?"

"I have that honor," Mr. Worthington answered, stiffly, greatly wondering what *possible* business it could be of Dr. Keith's whether he was or not.

Dr. Keith hesitated a moment before he said the next words.

"I fear Miss Byford is going to be very sick."

"Very sick!" echoed Mr. Worthington. "What appears to be the matter?"

"Small-pox," the doctor answered, gravely, "of the most virulent type, or I am greatly mistaken."

"Small-pox!" ejaculated Mr. Worthington, stepping backward. "Good heavens, Doctor! Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Very cool was the voice that answered,—

"There isn't the least danger of infection at present, and I hoped the family could rely on you in this emergency."

"Yes,—but,—the disease is *so* loathsome," said Mr. Worthington. "It will be likely to disfigure Miss Byford for life, won't it?"

Dr. Keith surveyed him from head to foot, before he answered,—

"The chances are that it *will*."

Mr. Worthington possessed himself of his hat, murmured something about a previous engagement, and hastily left the house, haunted by a vision of Edna, scarred and disfigured by marks of the dreadful, disgusting disease.

"Poor girl!" he said to himself, "I'm sorry, "but I never *could* stand that, *never*. And I guess the old man was right anyway. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to run abroad for a few months, and let the whole thing blow over. What a fortunate thing I have engaged passage in the *Europea*,—for myself and

wife. Ugh! what if she hadn't come down with the loathsome disease until after we started?"

By this time, Mr. Worthington had reached his room, and straightway he proceeded to write to Edna, as follows:

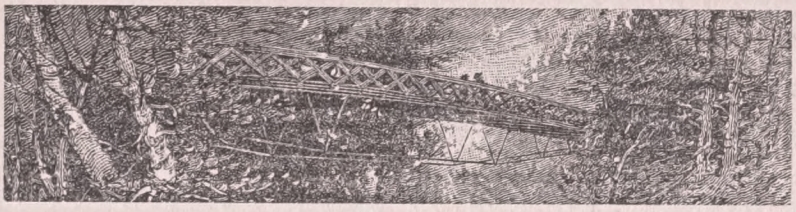
DEAR EDNA:

You can not be more surprised, when you read this letter, than I am at myself for writing it. But unforeseen circumstances have made our marriage an impossibility, and before you receive it I shall be many miles away. I can not tell you how sincerely I regret all this, nor how much I hope that you will recover from your illness, and find a friend more worthy of your regard than

ELMER C. WORTHINGTON.

The days had lengthened into weeks, and weeks to months, before Edna saw her letter. But Mrs. Byford shed bitter tears of disappointment as she read it. Then she folded it, and put it in Edna's desk, and to herself she said,—

"Poor child! perhaps death would be a merciful deliverance. There is nothing left worth living for."



CHAPTER XXI.

NOW people stared when they saw that card on the door. How they turned convenient corners, and crossed the street, and said, one to another, in awe-struck tones, "Small pox here!" And clamorous creditors bit their lips in vexation,—held at bay by those dreadful words.

Within the plague-stricken mansion, confusion reigned. Hither and thither flew distracted, terrified servants, hastily gathering their belongings together, and tossing them into trunks and satchels, deaf to any appeal but their own personal safety.

"What *shall* we do?" said Mrs. Byford, hopelessly, sinking into an easy-chair, and bursting into hysterical weeping.

Charlie paused in his gloomy walk up and down the room.

"We must do the best we can," he answered, despondently.

"But there is not a servant in the house, not one."

This in a woefully dejected tone.

"Oh well, we'll get along some way," and he tried to make his tone encouraging.

"That's all men and boys know about things," returned Mrs. Byford, almost impatiently. "I suppose you'll want your dinner, cook or no cook. And *such* a kitchen as they've left. Not a dish washed, and the fire all out. Oh dear, it's too dreadful!" and she buried her face in her handkerchief, and sobbed out the remainder of her troubles.

Charlie leaned his elbow on the mantel, and rested his head on his hand, in utter despondency.

About that time, Dr. Keith, in his private office, arose from his knees, and the closing words of his prayer were:

"Dear Lord, I leave the result in Thy hands. Be it life, or death, Thy will be done."

Triumphantly calm was his face as he said the words; then he seated himself at his study table, and proceeded to write a letter to his mother, one clause of which ran as follows:

"I know you have had the disease, so there can be no possible fear of contagion, and so rich a field of work for the Master rarely opens. But I know my precious mother will not act upon my advice alone, so, whatever her decision may be, I shall accept it as the best."

Half an hour later, he was talking earnestly with a kind-faced Irish woman.

"Sure, Dochter Kaith," she said, in her rich Irish brogue, "its meself would be glad to do annythin' in the worruld to oblige ye. Faith, an' I wouldn't be here the day if it wasn't for ye."

"I felt sure I could depend on you," he answered, kindly.

"Indade an' ye may. I'll pit on me bonnet to wanst, an' go wid ye, if ye says so."

"That will suit me perfectly," Dr. Keith answered, heartily.

And before Mrs. Byford had time to dry her eyes, he ushered Mrs. Nora McFlin into her presence.

"I've brought you something *better* than gold, Mrs. Byford," he said, cheerily. "A friend in need, is above price, you know."

"Ah!" Mrs. Byford said, with brightening face, "I had just given up, in despair."

"Things are never so bad, but they might be worse," Dr. Keith replied, hopefully.

Mrs. Byford shook her head, and looked doubtful.

"The *darkest* clouds have a silver lining, and the Psalmist tells us, 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning,'" he added, gently.

Then he went up to Edna's room, and Mrs. Byford turned to Mrs. McFlin.

"You are in search of a place, are you?" she questioned, briefly.

Mrs. McFlin surveyed her interlocutor with a surprised stare.

"It's not lookin' afther a place I am," she answered, respectfully, "but Dochter Kaith was afther wantin' me to come, an' it's annythin' in the worruld I'd do to plaze *him*."

Mrs. Byford arched her eyebrows, and Charlie bit his mustache to suppress a smile.

"Can you cook?" she contined.

"Sure, there's niver a thin' in the worruld I *can't* do if I tries!" Mrs. McFlin answered, with innocent self-complacency.

Charlie laughed.

"You're just the woman we want then," he said. "As near as I can make out, there's everything to do, and no one to do it."

"Phell, 'tis me private opinion that I bether set to worruck to wanst thin. An' if yez'll show me the way to the kitchen, I'll aisy find me way round afther that."

"Charlie," Mrs. Byford said, "will you go with her?"

And Charlie arose quickly, glad of any diversion.

"You'll find things in a *dreadful* condition," Mrs. Byford said, dolefully, as they left the room.

At the door of the dismal kitchen, Mrs. McFlin halted.

"Och, but it's the hurry they was in to be lavin'!" she cried. "Sure, an' it's plinty of hot wather it'll want, to clane up all thim dishes. An' niver a bit of fire in the shtove aither."

And with a resolute air she began to take the covers from the range.

"I wonther where they'll be afther kapin' their kindlin's," she said, presently.

And Charlie plunged down the sub-cellar stairs, returning in a moment with an armful. Novel work it was for exquisite Charlie Byford; nevertheless, he quite enjoyed it. And while he watched Mrs. McFlin deftly "lay the fire," he proceeded to cultivate her acquaintance.

"Dr. Keith is an old acquaintance of

yours?'' he said, by way of beginning a conversation.

By this time the fire was crackling briskly, and Mrs. McFlin rested her hands on her hips, as she answered,—

"Sure, it's the *illegant* gintleman, Dochter Kaith is!''

Charlie whittled industriously at a stick, and waited for her to say more.

"It was last fall, whin I had the faver, an' we was that poor we had niver a crust in the house, an' the neighbors all afeared to come near, for fear of gettin' the faver. ''Tis a cryin' shame,' says Pat, 'the mane way we're thrated!' An' thin, he took to dhrink that bad that it crazed him intirely. An' one night, whin little Peggy cried for somethin' to ate, what should Pat do but throw her clane across the room. 'Murther!' I shouted, an' Dochter Kaith, passin' jist at that blissed minnit, opened the dure.

"'What's the matther?' says he.

"'Sure, an' Pat's killed little Peggy!' I cried. Be that time Pat had run through the back dure, an' the dochter took little Peggy in his arrums, as tinder as a woman. I was that sick and thrimblin' I couldn't raise me hand to hilp him, an' he ondressed the child, an' comforted her that gentle, an' thin he turned to me.

"'My poor woman, what can I do for you?' he says, that kind.

"Phell he lift me some midicine, an' the nixt day he came agin, but not a bit did I know him; an' Pat sat on the edge av the bed, that broken-hearted, wid little Peggy in his arrums. Niver a word could he spake, for the shame he filt, an' the dochter talked that kind to him, an' towld him how foolish an' wickid it was for him to spind his airnin's in that sinseless way, niver providin' for his family, but jist ruinin' hissilf, body an' sowl. An', would ye belave it, Pat has niver dhrank a dhrap of the crather from that day to this!"

"Was the little girl much hurt?" questioned Charlie, quite interested in the woman's simple story.

"Indade, an' it's niver walkin' agin she'll be," Mrs. McFlin answered, sadly. "An' it's wild wid grafe Pat is, whin he thinks of it. But it's not hissilf he was at all, whin he did it. Och, but the shtrong dhrink causes a power of throuble!"

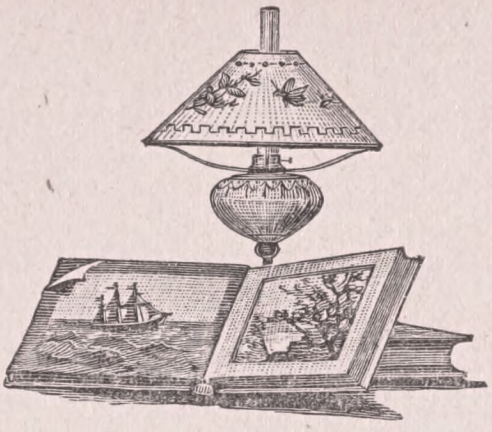
"Couldn't Dr. Keith do anything for the child?" Charlie questioned, sympathetically.

"An' it's iverythin' in the worruld he *has* done, that mortial man could do," Mrs. McFlin answered, decidedly. "But whin the back's clane broke, it's no dochter in the worruld can mind it. Sure, Dochter Kaith couldn't do more for wan of his own, than he's done for our Peggy. An' to see him come in his illegant sleigh, wid all the soft furs an' robes in it, an' carry the child out in his shtrong arrums, an' tuck her all in, like a baby. Och, it's few there are in the worruld like Dochter Kaith."

"I guess you're about right there," Charlie answered, heartily.

And then the water began to steam, and Mrs. McFlin rattled the dishes in a way that meant more work, and less play. So Charlie left her in her kingdom, and went away to his room, saying softly, to himself: "I believe he will help me. At any rate, I must have a talk with him."

But many days passed before he carried his decision into effect. Over the plague-stricken mansion hovered the death-angel, and the dark, dark days succeeded each other in their monotonous round, and there seemed to be nothing in the world that Charlie could do—but wait.



CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. KEITH read her letter thoughtfully.

"It is not the work I should have chosen," she soliloquized; "but, if not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's notice, what can there be for me to fear?" Saying which, she looked at her watch, then arose and gave the bell an energetic ring.

"I am going to Chicago this afternoon, Mary," she said to the answering servant. "Tell Pat to have the carriage at the door by two o'clock."

And then she sought Susie.

"O, mamma! how *could* Nelson write for you to come?" Susie cried, in dismay.

Exceeding gentle and tender was the low-toned answer,—

"'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'"

"Yes—I know. But—O, mamma!" sobbed Susie, struggling vainly with her tears, "it is such a *terrible* disease. And how *can* I do without you?"

Mrs. Keith tenderly smoothed her daughter's hair, as she answered:

"My dear child, when you are calmer you will think differently, and wish me God-speed on my errand."

Something in the calm, low voice quieted Susie instantly, and she brushed away the tears and answered, bravely,—

"And so I do! Now tell me what I can do to help you."

At almost that identical moment, Dr. Keith, sitting in his private office, received a telegram:

"I shall leave here in the 3 P. M. train," it read.

He uttered a low, fervent "Thank God!" as he read it; then he looked at his watch, and rang the office bell.

"John," said he, when the servant appeared, "I shall want the sleigh in readiness by half past four."

"Yes sir," answered John.

And thus it came to pass the following morning, when Mrs. Byford chanced to look out of the window, she suddenly exclaimed:

"Why, who under the sun is Dr. Keith bringing here now?"

"The sweetest-faced woman I ever saw, whoever she is," Charlie answered, decidedly.

And then Dr. Keith and his mother entered the room, and he said,—

"Mrs. Byford: my mother."

Mrs. Byford bowed, and he added with a rare, proud smile,—

"I have been peculiarly anxious to secure a good nurse for Miss Byford, so I have engaged the best one I ever knew, and I feel

almost certain you will be satisfied with my choice."

If Mrs. Byford had been a Bible-reader, and familiar with its beautiful wording, she might have exclaimed: "Surely! 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'"

As it was, her tongue was tied with astonishment, so strange, and utterly incomprehensible, seemed the unselfish self-sacrifice that could prompt anyone to brave contagion, and possible death, for the dearest friend. And she, a stranger,—what possible claim could *she* have on Mrs. Keith? she reasoned within herself; and then she cried,—

"Mrs. Keith, it can't be possible!"

"Yes," very gently, "if you will let me, I shall be glad to help you."

For all answer Mrs. Byford bowed her head on the mantel, and sobbed outright. Mrs. Keith bent over her, and spoke in pitying tones:

"Poor child! you are tired, and nervous; go

to your room and lie down, and I will attend to everything for you till you feel better."

"I'm ashamed of myself," said Mrs. Byford, struggling for composure; "but my head aches dreadfully this morning, and I believe I am more nervous than common."

"No wonder, with all you've gone through lately," Mrs. Keith said, in sympathetic tones. "I wonder that you have borne up so well."

Mrs. Byford wiped the tears from her eyes, and looked searchingly into the strong, tender face before her.

"And you really mean to stay with me!"

"If you would like to have me."

"I'm sure I can't see why you are willing to run such a fearful risk for perfect strangers," pursued Mrs. Byford. "What if you should take the disease, and die?"

Calm, and even-toned, was the voice that answered,—

"I should say: 'Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight.'"

To Mrs. Byford this utter self-abnegation came like a revelation. There was no bravado in the speaker's voice or manner, but the lovely face glowed with holy enthusiasm, surprising indeed to one who knew nothing of any but selfish impulses. She did not believe in "canting hypocrites," but—certainly Mrs. Keith was different from anyone with whom she had been familiar.

"And you are not afraid to die?" she questioned, in awe-struck tones.

"Why should I be," Mrs. Keith answered, gently, "since death is but the entrance into everlasting life? And then, the Apostle John tells us, 'There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying.'"

"I don't understand it at all," Mrs. Byford said, with a weary sigh.

"We will talk it all over after you have rested," Mrs Keith answered, cheerfully.

"Perhaps I *had* better lie down awhile," Mrs. Byford replied; "but let me show you to your room first."

"If there is one opening from Miss Byford's, it will be more convenient," suggested Dr. Keith.

"But we never put company there, it is so small!" protested Mrs. Byford.

"You musn't think of me as company," Mrs. Keith said, smiling.

And then they all went up to Edna's room, and Mrs. Byford exclaimed:

"Would you believe it, Edna, Mrs. Keith has come to stay with us!"

"Oh, I'm *so* glad!" cried Edna, clasping her little, feverish hands, in an ecstasy of delight.

"I'm going to put her in your boudoir," Mrs. Byford went on, "for the doctor insists that she shall be near you."

"But aren't you afraid? You know what is the matter with me?"

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Keith said, gently smoothing the tumbled hair from the flushed face; "and I am not frightened. I have had the disease."

Edna lifted her head, and looked with great, surprised eyes into the lovely face before her.

"You've had the small-pox!" she said. "Please tell me about it."

"It was many years ago, when I was a young girl like you, that it happened. I was at Rockford Seminary, and they built a little house in the grove, and there I lived, quite alone with my nurse, until I recovered."

"How funny," said Edna. "And it didn't disfigure you a bit!"

Mrs. Keith smiled.

"If you had seen me at that time, you would have thought me a frightful object; but good care saved me from the dreadful pitting that the disease sometimes leaves."

As she talked, Mrs. Keith's cool, mesmeric hand passed lightly over the sick girl's hair, and almost as soon as she stopped speaking Edna sank into a peaceful sleep.

"She hasn't slept like that since she was sick," whispered Mrs. Byford; and then she

went away to her room, and presently Dr. Keith and his mother stood alone together, and he said, gravely:

"I don't like the distracting headache Mrs. Byford complains of. If I am not mistaken, we shall have another patient on our hands before many days."

True and undaunted were the eyes that looked into his as he spoke, and not a tremor was there in the voice that answered,—

"We will do the best we can, and leave the result with God."

After that, the hours and the days went their monotonous round. Callers there were none, for a regiment of soldiers could scarcely have guarded the house better than that two-worded card. To be sure, the bell rang occasionally,—a nervous, jerking ring; then Nora would exclaim,—

"Och, an' it's the beautiful flowers someone's been afther lavin' for Miss Edna!"

Usually a cheerful little note nestled among

the leaves of basket or bouquet, and note or card always bore the name of "Ella Faircourt."

"It's another of her odd whims," the family said; and Mr. Faircourt answered:

"Let the child alone; there's little enough kindness in the world, God knows."

Quite wild with terror was the coachman, however, at this last freak.

"Dar ain't no use ob flyin' in de face ob Probidence, Miss Ella," he remonstrated. "An' doan' you know de small-pox am a powerful ketchin' disease?"

But Ella only laughed at his earnest protestations.

"Don't be frightened, Sambo; I'll take the flowers to the door myself," she answered. "You won't have to go any nearer the house than the curb-stone."

And day after day, the cheering little note and flowers came to the secluded family, like white-winged messengers of love.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MEANTIME, Dr. Keith's prediction was verified, and two patients claimed their care. And now,—unless you have seen a time when you had nothing in the world to do but wait; when you wandered aimlessly up and down the room; now pausing by mantel, or table, to handle books or trifles, in a purposeless way; then looking out of the window, wishing some one *would* come, or something would happen to relieve you from yourself,—you can hardly imagine how long the days were to Charlie Byford. Shut out from all association with the outside world, he had ample time for reflection, and intense bitterness—almost hatred of the author of all his misery—permeated his every thought.

"If God is kind, and all-powerful," he rea-

soned, "why does he permit such dreadful things to be? Can there be any possible *good* in sorrow? How can one *love* a God who thus afflicts?" These and kindred questions surged through his mind, and actually he would have scorned to believe that: "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth."

Sincerely did Dr. Keith pity the wan-eyed, unhappy-looking young man he met daily, and he devised various ways to cheer his loneliness. He brought him books and papers, and sometimes, when he could spare the time, they had a game of chess together. But, whether Dr. Keith played chess, or felt the pulse of a sick patient, there was something in his very presence that glorified his Master. And Charlie would ask himself the question, "What makes him so different from other people?"

But, before he had answered the question satisfactorily, there came a day so terrible that he could never recall it without a shudder. Up and down the parlor he paced, or, wearied

with walking, sat with his head bowed upon his hands. Occasionally a shriek of agony from the sufferers up-stairs penetrated the dense silence of the room. Other than this, there was not a sound in the great house. Everything was being done quietly and in order. Nora flew here and there, with quick, noiseless footsteps; while the stalwart nurse seemed like an automaton, doing all that professional skill *could* do, promptly and silently. And Mrs. Keith, alert, watchful, calm, hovered near, like a peace-giving influence. Not for an instant did they relax their efforts to beat back the grim enemy—Death; yet surely he was advancing, like a furious, wild beast, eager for his prey.

And the hours of the day wore on,—the last day Mrs. Byford would ever see,—and she lay, apparently, unconscious. It was Dr. Keith's third call that day, and he stood looking pityingly down at her, when she suddenly looked up at him with wild, startled eyes.

"Oh Doctor! am I going to die?" she cried.

And what could Dr. Keith — a Christian physician—say? Could he lull her to sleep on the brink of a precipice, without a word of warning? Could he stand idly by, and see her frail bark drift out upon the dark sea of death, and hold no beacon-light, to guide it through the gloom? Nay, verily. Not thus did Dr. Keith understand his mission.

"Mrs. Byford," he said,—and scarcely more tender could the Master's voice have been than his,—"are you prepared to meet your God?"

It would be impossible to convey to you the dismay expressed in the voice that anwered,—

"Oh no! And now it is too late!"

And Dr. Keith answered, impressively,—

"'Behold, *now* is the accepted time; *now* is the day of salvation.'"

For all answer, Mrs. Byford turned her head away from him, and wept bitterly. Presently the drowsiness of approaching death seized her brain, and she slumbered. Then—as will

often happen in the dying—there was a brief return of consciousness.

"Dr. Keith, if I go to Him *now*, will He receive me?" she asked, earnestly.

"He has said, 'Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out,'" the doctor answered, solemnly.

And in solemn, deliberate tones, Mrs. Byford said,—

> "'Just as I am, and waiting not
> To rid my soul of one dark blot,
> O Lamb of God! I come, I come!'"

"Amen! Thank God! Just as you are, He *will* receive," said Dr. Keith.

Mrs. Byford looked into his eyes,—a look of thanksgiving,—and then the force of ebbing life had spent itself, and her new-born soul was with its God.

Surely! "To him that knocketh it shall be opened," is the promise; and, if the thief on the cross found mercy, can we doubt but her simple petition opened wide the pearly gate for Mrs. Byford?

There was no stately funeral, no pomp, no display. At midnight, the undertaker screwed the coffin-lid fast over the poor, unsightly face; and instead of the sweet perfume of costly flowers, the heavy odor of strong disinfectants filled the room. And poor Charlie—denied the sad consolation of a last look at his mother's face—wept bitter tears, as he watched the lonely procession wend its way into the night's star-lit stillness. Then—prompted by an impulse of utter, hopeless dejection—he threw himself upon his knees. Not to pray? Ah no! What a relief it would have been to his overburdened heart, could he have cast his burden on the Lord.

In this attitude Mrs. Keith found him, and need I tell you that her heart went out in earnest prayer that this terrible affliction might work for Charlie Byford an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

"Oh, Mrs. Keith! I *can't* stand it!" he moaned.

And upon the bowed head Mrs. Keith laid a gentle, motherly hand, as she answered, in Job's beautiful words of resignation: "'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.'"

Then all the bitterness of Charlie's soul burst forth.

"If there *is* a God, I hate him!" he said, recklessly; and Mrs. Keith almost feared for the poor boy's reason, so wild and haggard was his face.

Not in her own words, but in words of Holy Writ, Mrs. Keith replied:

"'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.' I hope your mother leaned on that Staff, Charlie, as she entered the dark valley."

"But—mother was not a Christian!" said Charlie, doubtfully.

"'There is life for a look at the Crucified One,'" Mrs. Keith's quiet voice answered. "Did you ever read how the laborers that

came into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, received equal pay with those who had borne the burden and heat of the day?"

She turned the leaves of her pocket Bible as she spoke, and handed it to him, saying,

"I must go to Edna now; perhaps you would like to read the story for yourself."

And Charlie—interested, in spite of himself, to learn anything that could possibly refer to his mother—read, not only that, but many other wonderful things.

As for Edna, quite oblivious was she of everything, as she moaned and tossed restlessly, muttering incoherent, inarticulate questions and answers, or—living over again some past gayety—laughed, a wild, elfish laugh. Very grave looked Dr. Keith, when, as the gray tint of early day crept up the eastern sky, he came down to get a cup of coffee, and perhaps snatch a few moments' sleep.

"An' it's *that tired* yer lookin', Dochter!" said sympathetic Nora. "Sure, an' yez'll be

wearin' yerself out wid the watchin' an' the care!"

The doctor smiled,—a quiet little smile,—at her anxiety; then he answered, kindly:

"The promise is, 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' However, I will lie down for an hour."

Nora flew to get a pillow, and waited to see him comfortably settled; then she went away to the kitchen, saying softly to herself:

"Och, an' it's the born angel Dochter Kaith is, to be sure!"

The hours of the day wore on, and the deep shadows of night fell, and midnight settled down upon the silent street. And Dr. Keith knew that life and death hung evenly balanced in the scales, and they would tip one way or the other before the break of day.

Suddenly Edna started up, with outstretched hands,—as if to ward off some dreadful presence.

"Death is in the room!" she cried. "He's

come for me! Don't let him take me! Oh, hold me back from his terrible embrace!"

Her voice died away in a scream of agony, and she sank back exhausted,—almost lifeless. Not a trace of beauty was there in the swollen, repulsive face; and Elmer Worthington would have turned in horror from the sight. But Dr. Keith looked—a look of almost divine pity—into the burning eyes, and laid his hand gently on her head.

"Edna," he said, "there is One mighty to save. Why don't you call on *Him* for help?"

The low, calm voice arrested her wandering thought, and a momentary ray of reason shot into the wild eyes.

"Oh! Dr. Keith, pray for me!" she said.

And down upon his knees went Dr. Keith,—his hand resting, as if in blessing, upon the fevered head,—and prayed.

He prayed that the past, with all its folly and sinfulness, might drop away from her, like a worn-out garment, and that she might

arise from that sick-bed a new creature in Christ Jesus; and in His hands become the instrument of good to her fellow-men. But if, in His good sight, it was best for her to cross the dark river, he prayed that she might go down into the dark waters leaning on the "Strong Arm." He prayed that—be the issue what it might—the Infinite Compassion might fold her closely; that underneath, and round about her, might be the Everlasting Arms.

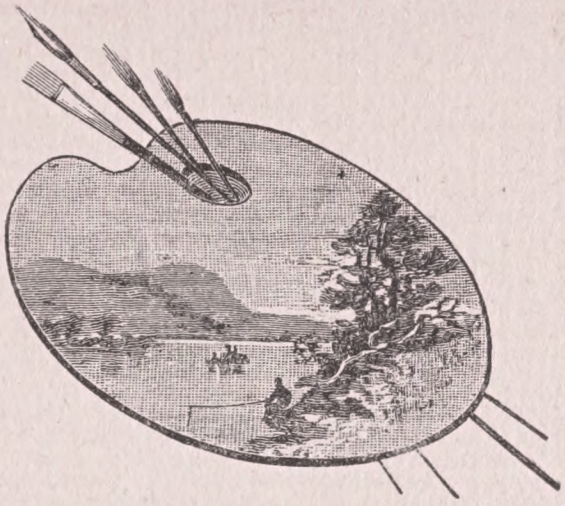
Clear upon the stillness fell the earnest words,—a strong, sure confidence in the tone that uttered them that told they came from a heart that fully trusted the goodness and mercy of the Lord. And down into Edna's beclouded consciousness went the earnest tones, touching her hardened heart; and when the doctor ceased speaking, soft tears were stealing through her eyelids.

"Oh, Doctor," she said, "if God spares my life, I intend to be a Christian."

"Thank God!" he said, fervently. "Now

you had better sleep." He took a spoonful of some mixture standing near him, and placed it to her lips; then, with a woman's gentleness, arranged the pillows, and sat by her—his grave, gentle presence an anodyne in itself.

And so the crisis was passed. Edna Byford lived.



CHAPTER XXIV.

SNUG and cheerful was the cosy library in which Susie Keith sat on that bleak March day. Outside, the gray, wintry landscape, with its naked trees and drifted snow, looked uninviting and cheerless. Within, the glowing fire in the grate, the choice flowers blooming in the southern window, the heavy crimson curtains, all contributed to give the room a peculiarly comfortable and home-like air. To this snuggery, Susie had brought her books and painting, since her mother's absence; and on this particular morning she was hidden, with her easel, in the embrasure of the window, behind the heavy curtains.

She herself made a charming picture,—or so thought Dr. Gordon, as he came briskly up the walk, and saw through the window the sweet, womanly face in profile, the softly waving hair, coiled from the broad, smooth brow into an aureole of splendor, and the clear eyes fixed intently upon the picture she was copying. Dr. Gordon took in at a glance the softness and grace of dress and attitude. Even the touch of sadness—with which the Great Artist illumines the loveliest faces—did not escape his notice.

But quite unconscious of his presence was Susie, as she went on with her work, humming softly,—

> "Majestic sweetness sits enthroned
> Upon the Savior's brow;
> His head with radiant glory crowned,"—

And then, Dr. Gordon parted the curtains, and surprised her at her work.

"Ah! copying a head of the Christ!" he said. And what wonder if a little dream flitted

through his brain as he folded the little hand in his, and looked down into the sweet, flushed face.

"I don't think," he continued, "Art has ever given us a just conception of the Kingly One. I have seen dozens of artistic conceptions of Him, but they usually represent Him as a weak, suffering sentimentalist,—destitute of either physical or mental force. Now, it seems to me absurd, and in the last degree inartistic, to delineate the greatest leader in the world's history,—who, poor, despised, and alone, yet had the courage to attack the prejudices and practices of His day, and speak 'as one having authority' to the great men of the nation,—as a sentimental enthusiast. It was no coward, moral or physical, who preached the sermon on the mount to a Jewish audience of that day, denouncing the old Mosaic law, and fearlessly hurling denunciation against thrones, and principalities, and powers. Art has never yet conceived the Christ who 'arose and re-

buked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still.' It has never imagined the commanding presence of Him who said, 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest.' It has utterly failed to comprehend the grandeur of His mission, and the tireless energy, the undaunted courage, the indomitable will, the unflinching firmness, the patience and long-suffering required to accomplish it. Ah! wondrously beautiful must have been His face, uniting as it did such sweetness and such strength. No wonder women loved Him, and followed Him, with tearful eyes, to the cross,—aye, even to the sepulchre."

"For *such* a Master, one could live or die," said Susie, her face radiant with enthusiasm.

"I sometimes wonder," Dr. Gordon said, with a grave smile, "where young people, who are fond of romance, can find a more thrilling story, or a grander hero, than Jesus of Nazareth. Born in a stable,—and became the Savior of the world; to-day, a poor, unknown

carpenter; and to-morrow gathering countless multitudes around Him, to listen to the marvelous words of rebuke, and cheer, and prophecy, that He spoke. Past middle life, and scarcely known beyond His humble home, and straightway thereafter 'preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness among the people;' going through all that region of country in a triumphal march, vast multitudes pressing around Him, esteeming it an honor but to touch the hem of His garment; while He spoke to them words of burning eloquence, that have never been equaled.

"Strange beyond the wildest dream of fancy was His life. Not the Arab, who sits at nightfall and lets his imagination people the cloudland with genii and demons, ever conceived a story so romantic, nor one-half so heroic. Knowing, from the beginning to the end of His ministry, that a cross awaited him, yet He never faltered, but went fearlessly about His

Father's business. And when the end came,—when they had plaited a crown of thorns, and put it upon His head, 'and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!'—even then, with more than royal dignity, He said, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Then the glorious eyes closed; the grand head drooped; the sacrifice was finished;—the King of kings was dead.

"'He had suffered a sorrow which none may tell,
He had purchased a gift unpriced;
When His work was over, the moonlight fell
On the sleeping face of Christ.'

"No costly coffin of purple velvet awaited His remains; no victor-car bore Him to his tomb. Ah no! only one man was there brave enough to claim the poor, mutilated body and wrap it in its winding-sheet, and lay it in a sepulchre. A few faithful women 'followed after,' and wept for their illustrious dead; but through the misty veil of their tears fell a curve of hope. One consolation brought compensation

for their bereavement. Had He not said, 'I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice?'

"And sure enough, triumphant over the last enemy,—Death,—He arose and folded together His burial clothes, and meeting repentant Mary, called her by name. Just imagine her glad surprise when she saw Him, her risen Lord and Master."

Susie's uplifted soul shone through her eyes as she listened. It was the old, old story; but strangely new it seemed, as Dr. Gordon's low, earnest voice recounted it.

"How she must have loved Him!" she said, with a burst of self-forgetful enthusiasm. "What joy it must have been to hear Him speak her name."

And Dr. Gordon, looking into the radiant face, thought, "Surely, Christ's chosen ones need no imaginary halo around their heads, for 'His Father's name, written in their foreheads,' gives more than human brilliancy to every feature."

This little aside conversation was carried on while he was saying with his lips, "Not to Mary alone was given this crowning joy. 'Thus saith the Lord that created thee, Fear not; for I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.'"

"Yes—but to have seen Him!" said Susie, eagerly; "to have heard His voice!"

And Dr. Gordon answered, reverently,—

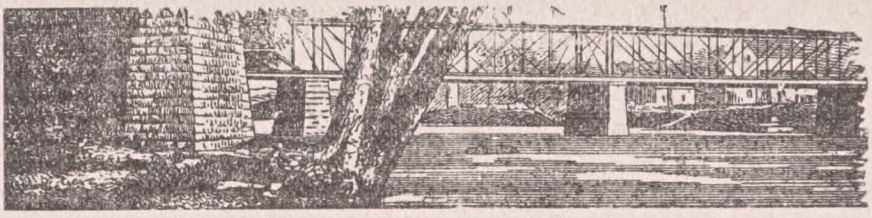
"'As for me, I shall be satisfied when I awake with His likeness.'"

He arose then, quite forgetting the errand on which he had come, and the dispatch announcing Mrs. Byford's death lay unthought of in his pocket. He looked down at Susie, and a new, strange radiance in his deep, earnest eyes, or else—who knows—something in her own heart, made a dainty color creep into her cheek. One moment he hesitated; then he said, earnestly:

"Susie, my dear friend, I love you; I believe in God's sight you belong to me. Come!"

He opened wide his arms, and without a word she glided into them; and close, close to his heart he folded her,—God's best gift to man: a noble, pure-hearted woman.

There was no dread, no uncertainty, in that blissful moment. Firm on the Rock of Ages stood their feet, and with that firm foundation beneath them, they could defy the storms of life.



CHAPTER XXV.

AN hour later, Dr. Gordon entered Mr. Keith's private office.

By the way, it just occurs to me that I have unintentionally slighted Mr. Keith, by not introducing him to your notice. If I sketch him for you, sitting in his leather-cushioned chair, behind his rosewood desk, with a Stock Exchange in his hand; his dark, wide-awake eyes scanning the latest market report,—like a skillful checker-player, studying out the next expert move,—his white, firm, shapely hand threading through the dark hair, that was prone to fall over his broad, high forehead, perhaps it will be a natural portrait.

A thorough, honest, upright business man, was Mr. Keith. Everybody liked him; everybody trusted him. "His word is as good as his note," was the verdict of the business

world. And only in the *business* world was Mr. Keith truly at home. Here he was really himself—prompt, alert, suave, obliging; always having an eye open for the "main chance," yet strictly honorable in all his dealings.

Very proud was he, and exceedingly fond, of his wife, and to her every material wish gave instant heed. But, if her soul, in its loneliness, cried out for succor and a husband's strong uplifting, then the piteous appeal fell upon deafened ears.

"Religion is well enough for women and children," he said; "but a business man hasn't time for such nonsense."

So it was that Mrs. Keith walked her spiritual way alone; and this was the skeleton in her closet. Ah! many noble women there are who thus "tread the wine-press, alone;" and it may be to them the words were written: "Thy Maker is thy husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name."

And now, perhaps, you are inclined to pity

Mrs. Keith, and imagine him a brutal, unsympathetic husband. But he was no such thing. As the world goes, he was a model man—his blameless life an open book. I think had Jesus seen him he would have "loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest." His mistake lay in that he forgot, while laying up treasures upon earth, to also lay up for himself treasures in heaven. Many there are who err in this way, and find, when it is too late, that moth and rust have corrupted, or thieves broken through and stolen, their precious hoard.

"Life is so short, and uncertain; eternity so long, and sure," Mrs. Keith sometimes said, when on the Sabbath he relaxed from the strain and pressure of business, and found time to enjoy her society.

He smiled—a smile that was almost sarcastic—when he answered,

"My dear wife, a man's first concern should be to provide for his family!"

And right royally did Mr. Keith do this. As his son grew to manhood he lavished money without stint upon his education, and felt unbounded pride in his noble character. But wholly ignorant was he of the hidden mainspring that impelled his boy above the shoals of temptation that shipwreck so many promising young lives. Indeed, Mr. Keith quite prided himself that from *him* his son inherited the innate good qualities that made him what he was. And, no doubt, in this he was partially correct; for I think you will agree with me when I say that good blood goes a long way in the make-up of a grand, Christian character. A man, trammeled and held back by inherent baseness, may make out to live a fair, Christian life; but none but the dear Christ can ever know the temptations, "the buffetings from within, and without," he endures before he has brought his body into subjection, and can truthfully say, with Paul, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my

infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Like a crown Mrs. Keith had worn her grace of wife and motherhood. Year after year, she had labored to make the air of her home pure and genial; to throw around her husband every tie of love, and every influence, that could win him from the world, to Christ. And year by year—though he would not have been willing to admit it—she *did* gain ground. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord," and a life so pure, so evenly sweet, could hardly be lived year after year beside him without influencing his own. Gradually—so gradually that he scarcely knew it—things spiritual grew to have a deeper meaning to him, and sometimes he almost resolved to leave the rush and whirl of business, and learn for himself if these things were really true. But life never stands still; so the years went their swift course, and Mrs. Keith, far up the shining ladder, cast back appealing glances toward him,

who should have been her support and stay; and, with a grand, unconscious patience, went her lonely way, ever breathing her earnest prayer that, in His own good time and way, God would bring this soul—more precious than her own life—to Himself. And out of such travail of soul, souls are born into the kingdom.

But there comes a time in every woman's life when nervousness, despondency, hysteria, weary days and sleepless nights beset her on every side, and the one earthly blessing most longed for, highest prized, is a husband's tender sympathy. Other friends may crowd around her, offering all that friend may give of help, of love; but to him *alone* is given the exclusive right of going with her, as it were, through the golden gate of young womanhood into the promised land of serene old age. And Mrs. Keith, with her strong, unwavering faith, was a woman, after all; and sorely did she need the sweet companionship, the strong up-

holding, only a husband can give. But Mr. Keith, preoccupied with his business, understood nothing of this; the deepest meaning of his wife's soul was a sealed mystery to him, and the burdens which it was his right to share she bore alone.

"It is not real living to spend all your energies, and all your thought—to make yourself selfish, and hard, and narrow—for mere temporal blessings," protested Mrs. Keith. "And when you have gained houses and lands and superfluous thousands, what are they, after all, compared with the deep and broad spiritual things that go to build 'a house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'"

"Well, my dear," responded Mr. Keith, "I don't know much about the life beyond; perhaps by and by I will take the time and look into the matter. Just now, however, my business is all I can attend to."

"My husband," she answered, her great, gray eyes shining with inward light, "if God

should say to you, 'This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?'"

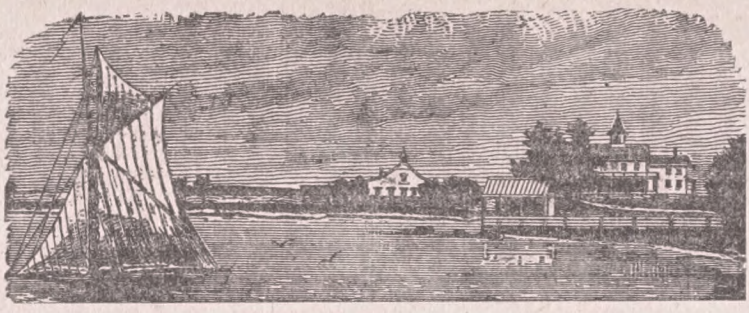
"H'm," said Mr. Keith," "When you Christians are getting the worst in a good, square argument, you always begin to croak about death."

And Mrs. Keith answered, gently: "'For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.'"

And now, perhaps, you have guessed that Mr. Keith was not delighted to see Dr. Gordon —as a minister of the gospel. To be sure, he arose with alacrity, and said, cordially:

"Good morning, Doctor. Glad to see you."

But to himself, he said, "Now I'm in for it, certain!" And then he braced himself in his chair, with a prepared-for-the-worst feeling. So you will not be surprised to learn that he actually felt relieved when Dr. Gordon made known his errand.



CHAPTER XXVI.

THE following day's mail brought three letters to Mrs. Keith, all treating upon the same subject. Over one clause in Susie's she smiled, and then looked grave. It ran thus:

"But oh, mamma! it makes me fairly tremble, when I think of being a minister's wife."

A grave responsibility it would be for her young daughter to assume, Mrs. Keith admitted; and yet, the blessedness of sharing that high and holy work of love; of walking side by side with one whose mission was to draw others into the felt presence of God; the inexpressible joy of daily, hourly association with one whose business, profession, study in life would be, to do all the good he could. Such a life would, indeed, be well worth the

living, and surely its sequel must be a glad and full content.

Something of this she said in her true, motherly answer. And Susie—every womanly instinct quickened into new life—for the first time rightly interpreted the wistful look in her mother's tender eyes.

"How happy mother would be if father was a Christian," she mused thoughtfully. And from that time, earnest indeed were her prayers in his behalf.

Meantime, while her life flowed on to a golden tune, poor Edna struggled back to life. It was April before she sat up at all, and many days later before Charlie looked his first, startled look of horrified wonder into his sister's discolored face,—so strangely unlike the beautiful girl of a few short weeks before. Had he been the Charlie of happier days, most likely he would have ridiculed the grotesque little cap that answered in place of the luxuriant golden hair that had so entangled

Dr. Gordon. As it was, however, the memory of all that had happened since they last met surged over him, and without a word he took her little, wasted hand in his; and with one irrepressible sob, "Oh, Charlie!" she wound her arms around his neck.

"My poor little sister!" he said, softly. "Thank God, *you* are spared to me!"

"I suppose it was nothing but a miracle that saved my life," Edna answered, thoughtfully.

"Dr. Keith *is* a wonderful doctor," responded Charlie, heartily.

"Yes, Dr. Keith is *splendid*," said Edna. "But it wasn't him who saved my life; he says so himself."

Charlie smiled leniently at his sister's delusion.

"I guess you're a little off there, Sis," he said quickly. "If it wasn't Dr. Keith, who was it?"

And Edna answered, softly and reverently,—

"It was God, Charlie! Dr. Keith says he could have done *nothing* without His help."

Strange words these from frivolous, vain, unthinking Edna Byford. Inexpressible astonishment held Charlie silent for a moment; then he said, quite sharply:

"If God is so powerful, why did He let mother die?"

Edna raised her eyes, swimming in tears, to his.

"Poor mamma!" she said, sadly; "I don't understand it at all; but you know He says: 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.'"

Charlie arched his eyebrows, and arose suddenly.

"I'm afraid I'm tiring you, Sis. The doctor said I musn't stay long," said he.

"Oh Charlie," said Edna, "I wish you'd hand me my writing-desk, before you go."

So Charlie brought the desk, and then he went away to his room, muttering to himself:

"Upon my word, I wonder what'll happen next! The *idea* of *Sis* talking religion! I'm afraid her sickness has made her weak in the upper story. I do hope, when she gets strong again, she'll get over it."

But she didn't. And in his inmost heart Charlie didn't want her to "get over it." In his secret thoughts, he actually longed for the wonderful, upholding, peace-giving influence that made Dr. Keith and his mother so unlike anyone he had ever known.

As for Edna, she opened her desk and listlessly turned over its contents until she came to Elmer Worthington's farewell letter. There was a good deal of the old flash to her eyes as she read it; then she looked out of the window, feeling strangely forlorn and desolate. Her conversation with her brother had revived old memories,—or recollections, that her terrible illness made seem remote,—and now the severance of the last tie binding her to the past, saddened her inexpressibly. And yet, min-

gling with the sadness, there came a realizing sense of the fact that she was thankful the past, with all its folly,—its empty pride, its idle pleasure,—had dropped away from her, like a worn-out garment. She realized fully that she did not love—never could have loved—Elmer Worthington; and that it was best for them both that their paths so widely diverged. All this Edna understood fully; more than that, she certainly felt very grateful to God for thus mercifully preserving her from the consequences of her own folly. Still,—though there are no broken hearts to be talked about,—there was an all-alone feeling in her heart that made her sad. She held the open letter in her hand for a few moments; then she said, emphatically:

"Well, I'm glad of it. There!"

At this point, Dr. Keith came in.

"Ah, I'm afraid you are overtaxing your strength," he said, gravely.

Then he gently closed the open desk, and placed it on the table.

Edna smiled.

"I thought it would amuse me to read over some of the letters of condolence I have received during my illness." Then, gravely, "This is one of them; if you will read it, you will know all about it, better than I can tell you."

Dr. Keith took the letter, somewhat hesitatingly.

"My poor child!" he said, in pitying tones. "I am sorry you read this just now."

Edna raised a pair of very bright eyes to his, and answered:

"Why, doctor, I believe it has done me good."

He smiled gravely at her earnestness.

"I believe counter-irritants *are* beneficial in some cases," he answered, dryly.

That same afternoon, Charlie had the long-deferred talk with Dr. Keith. Now, the Doctor had given this subject—of Charlie's future—very serious thought. Through all the young

man's lightness, he had not failed to see the latent nobility of character, only waiting development; and it was no new thought to him, though greatly surprised was Charlie, when he proposed for him a few years of close study, thereby fitting him for some profession.

"Why, Doctor!" he cried; "you have forgotten that we are absolutely penniless."

Dr. Keith laid his firm, shapely hand on the young man's shoulder,—something as an elder brother would caress a younger,—and his voice was more than kind, as he said:

"I wish you would trust this matter to me, Charlie,—that is, the pecuniary part of it. Of course you must decide for yourself whether my plan suits you, or not."

In vain did Charlie try to answer,—tears choked his utterance. And Dr. Keith went on to say kind, brotherly words, that throbbed in his heart, and awakened purposes that never slept again. So, in that interview was sown the seed that years afterward ripened

into glorious fruit. To be a man like Dr. Keith became from that time the one ambition of Charlie Byford.

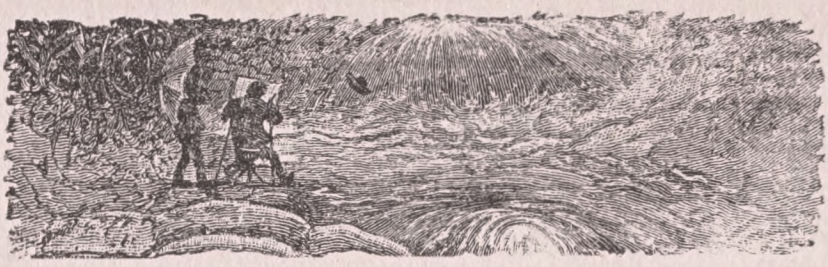
Ah! a grand thing it is to thus stand a guiding star for any soul. And more glorious still the thought, that through a blessed eternity that same soul shall shine, a star in the immortal crown of him—or her—who led it into the light and joy of a Savior's love.

Meanwhile, the commonplace duties of life pressed upon their notice. With Edna's recovery, and the withdrawal of the obnoxious card, impatient creditors beset them on every side. Of course, their only plan was to yield up everything not absolutely necessary; and upon Charlie devolved the sadly difficult task of selecting and deciding what articles were indispensable. Well was it for him that, in the utter bewilderment of that trying time, he could rely upon the judgment of friends like Dr. Keith and his mother.

After the discussion of many plans, it was

finally decided that Charlie should go abroad, and finish his education; Edna, meanwhile, making her home with the Keiths.

And into Charlie's heavy heart never once crept the thought, that the Lord would "make darkness light before them."



CHAPTER XXVII.

IT was the last day of April, and Susie went about the house with a shining, expectant face.

"Sure, an' its happy ye're lookin', Miss Susie," said Bridget, looking admiringly at the bright face.

"Why shouldn't I look happy, Bridget," answered Susie," when mamma is coming home to-day?"

But the bright, glad light of welcome clouded, when she looked into her mother's face.

"Oh mamma!" she cried, "are you sick?"

Mrs. Keith kissed her daughter tenderly,—oh so tenderly,—before she answered:

"Perhaps I have been a little *homesick*, darling. I shall be all right to-morrow."

But when to-morrow came, and Mrs. Keith

tried to rise as usual, she fainted; and Mr. Keith sent an imperative message to Dr. Bryant.

"I am only overtired," Mrs. Keith said, when she recovered consciousness.

But quite otherwise thought the doctor.

"She has completely used up her nervous force," he said, gravely. "There is absolutely nothing left to build upon."

Mr. Keith's face paled visibly at the ominous words; but he set his lips firmly, and made a vain effort to appear calm and self-controlled. As for Susie, poor child! they echoed through her heart like the knell of doom.

Thus began the vigils of that weary time. Mr. Keith hovered constantly round the house, now going up to his wife's bedside, saying some reassuring word to her; then, in irritation, saying to Susie,—

"You mustn't be so anxious, child! There is nothing to be alarmed about,—nothing at all."

But his white, distressed face belied his

words, and poor Susie's heart grew heavier with the passing hours. And when, as night came on, her mother sank into absolute unconsciousness, her pale, anguished face attracted the notice of the busy doctor, to whom the scene of white-faced, wan-eyed watchers, hanging upon his every look and word, for a crumb of hope, was by no means new.

"You mustn't take it so hard, little girl," he said, trying to speak encouragingly. "There is always hope, while there is life."

To Mr. Keith he said, very gravely: "It is impossible to tell how it will terminate. I think she is a *very* sick woman. Perhaps you would feel better satisfied if I counseled with Dr. Keith."

So Dr. Keith was dispatched for, and with the morning light he came. Mr. Keith met him at the door, and wrung his hand in speechless agony. Then he said, huskily:

"Nelson, my boy, you *must* save your mother!"

"All that medical skill can do shall be done, father," Dr. Keith answered, gently. "But life and death are in God's hands; our help must come from *Him.*"

To this Mr. Keith had no answer; and together they went up to the sick-room, and very softly to the bedside, and stood looking down on the wan, unconscious face. Never before had Dr. Keith seen that dear face without an answering look of sympathy, or smile of love, and, for a brief moment, his professional calmness almost gave way. He stooped and felt the faint pulse, to hide his emotion from his father's searching eye; then, though his set lips gave forth no sound, a white-winged messenger bore his petition for counsel, for help, for strength, to the ear of the Great Physician. And back to his waiting heart came the answer:

"Fear not; I will help thee."

Strangely incomprehensible this telegraphy may seem to those who know nothing of the

childlike, earnest faith that turns to the Heavenly Father for every daily and hourly need. With Dr. Keith, the habit of prayer, in every emergency, was as simple a thing to do as to speak to an earthly friend. To him the Savior was no far-off myth, but a blessed reality, a living presence, a perpetual joy. And to him—not as a dead letter, but a living truth—came the words:

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye *will*, and it shall be done unto you."

It was not strange, then, that his face visibly lightened. And it was but natural that Mr. Keith, knowing nothing of this hidden manna, this spring of living water, should think the brightening look meant hope.

"You think she is better, Nelson?" he whispered, eagerly.

The Doctor shook his head. Then he arose, and motioned his father to follow him out of the room.

"I would go and lie down, father, if I was you," he said, kindly. "She will not rally from this state for hours; and it will only tire you unnecessarily to watch by her."

"Is there *nothing* that can be done?" Mr. Keith asked, sadly.

"There is nothing to do at present, but wait," was the Doctor's answer; "except," he added, earnestly, "to pray for her."

Mr. Keith's keen eyes fixed themselves for a moment piercingly on his son's face. Then he turned without a word, and sought refuge in his room; and the Doctor went silently down to the library, to consult with Dr. Bryant.

"Of course it is impossible to tell," Dr. Bryant said, presently; "but I confess, I see little chance for her recovery."

"I am glad to remember the result is in higher hands than ours," Dr. Keith answered, quietly.

"Yes—I know what you mean, Doctor," Dr. Bryant said, incredulously. "But, my dear man, the days of miracles are past."

And the busy doctor drew on his gloves, and went his way to other homes, where they waited eagerly his coming.

The long days, filled with sickening anxiety, wore on, and hope was slowly dying out in the hearts of the watching friends. On the seventh night the crisis came, and over the calm, patient face crept the last pale-gray shadow. It was the scene oftentimes repeated, yet ever new to the aching hearts to whom it comes. A speechless, breathless little group, helplessly waiting—for what? Dr. Keith was in his place by the bedside, his mother's hand in his. Beside the bed knelt Mr. Keith, every lineament of his face stamped with utter despair.

"Oh God, I can not bear it!" he moaned, in his agony, bowing his head on the pillow.

And then, I think, the waiting angels must have whispered, joyfully,—

"Behold, he prayeth!"

And, if "joy shall be in heaven over one sin-

ner that repenteth," then the angels were exceeding glad that night. Totally ignorant were the other watchers of that wondrously beautiful tableau. Not one of them saw the pearly gate, thrown widely open, through which a cloud of witnesses pressed, eager to see the recording angel write that new name in the Book of Life. Neither had they the faintest conception of the heavenly radiance that streamed down into Mr. Keith's entranced soul. And not a note did they hear of the angels' echoing song:

"Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!"

There was a slight stir in the room—a smothered exclamation from Susie, a whisper from Dr. Bryant, a low, fervent, "Thank God!" from Dr. Keith—and when Mr. Keith raised his head, his wife looked into his eyes with quiet, conscious love. He looked at Dr. Bryant's warning finger, and tried hard not to betray his feelings, but to speak calmly and naturally. But with the attempt at words he broke down

utterly, and gathering her thin hand in both of his, he bowed his head and wept like a child. She laid her other hand on his, and said, in a low whisper:

"My poor husband!"

Dr. Bryant lifted up his hands in dismay; but when he tried to speak, his voice failed, and he turned away; and Dr. Keith knelt down by his father, saying, softly:

"My God, I thank thee! Thou hast heard our prayer."

Presently, the nurse administered a few spoonfuls of some strengthening liquid, and then Mrs. Keith closed her eyes, with a little, satisfied sigh, and dropped into a peaceful, natural sleep. Then Dr. Bryant went on tip-toe to the hall, and Dr. Keith followed him.

"I never saw anyone nearer death," Dr. Bryant said. "I had no idea she would revive; but I think that last medicine saved her."

Dr. Keith answered him reverently:

"It is written, 'The prayer of faith shall save the sick.'"

A happy household was the Keiths' during the following days of hopeful watching, when Mrs. Keith came gradually out from "the valley of the shadow." But the culmination of their joy was reached that first Sunday, when she was lifted into her easy-chair.

It was toward the evening's close of that tranquil, perfect day of rest, that Mr. Keith quietly took the Bible, and, opening it reverently, read to his family the one hundred and third psalm. His voice trembled slightly as he read the first verse:

"'Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name;'" but there came a strong, sure gladness into the tone, as he read the twelfth verse: "'As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.'"

"My children," he said, as he closed the book, "I have been groping in the dark for

years and years; but God is merciful; His blessed love has reached after me, and to-night I praise His holy name, that He has not forsaken me, but, 'by a way that I knew not,' He has at last led me out of darkness, into His marvelous light. And now, my dear wife and children, from this time we will walk Heavenward together."

And then Mr. Keith's family gathered about him, and welcomed him, with tearful eyes, into their very midst.

"Let us pray," said Dr. Gordon; and never had he prayed as he did then, when he gave voice to the thanksgiving of that united family.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"SUSIE!" called a clear, ringing voice, and the owner of it had one foot on the stair below, and stood looking up.

"Yes! Come up to mother's room!" responded Susie."

"Oh, how pleasant it is here!" Edna said, standing with head bent a little on one side. "If I ever keep house, I intend to have a room just like this."

It *was* a beautiful room,—I wish I were able to sketch it for you. I should like to show how the firelight fell on Mrs. Keith's sweet face. It was here that Mr. Keith sought relaxation from business, or rest on the comfortable lounge, while his wife read to or talked with him. Hither, also, came Nelson, to have long confidential talks with his mother. And many a time had he gone out from that

room refreshed and strengthened for the battle of life.

"I believe the very air of this room is hallowed," he said, sometimes.

And so it was,—made sacred by a Christian mother's prayers. Ah! who can estimate a mother's boundless influence? Or who, but a mother, can receive her priceless recompense?

If Susie's future life was a benediction to others,—if she walked by Dr. Gordon's side, one with him in every noble thought and aspiration, inciting him ever to noblest action,—she owed the foundation of her beautiful life to those quiet hours when she nestled on a hassock at her mother's feet, and learned of her sweet, never-forgotten lessons of patient, hopeful trust.

"Let's see," Edna went on; "in the first place I should want an open fire, to make the room look cheerful and cozy; then, of course, I should have to have a bay-window, filled with

the choicest flowers and vines ; lace curtains, of cobweb fineness ; a carpet, absolutely perfect in its soft, delicate beauty; chairs, large and small, but easy all. There, that's a rhyme; so I guess I'll stop to wish."

"Ah, but you have left out the most important thing!" cried Susie. "What would the room be without mother?"

Mrs. Keith smiled a little at Susie's eagerness.

"Sure enough!" returned Edna. "I don't think *I* shall ever have a room just like this, after all."

Whereupon she nestled down on the hearth-rug in front of Mrs. Keith, and gathered her hand within both her own.

"Oh Mrs. Keith!" she said, earnestly. "If I were to try my very *best*, do you think I could *ever* hope to be anything like you?"

"My dear child," Mrs. Keith said, in her sweetest, tenderest way; "if I have any virtue that you think worthy to be emulated, it lies in

this, and only this: Christ is in my soul; He is mine; and if there is any sweetness in my life, it is because His Spirit flows forth from mine. I wish—oh, how earnestly—that I could impress upon the mind of every young Christian their need of a *living, personal love to Christ.*"

"I think I *do* love Him, just a little," ventured Edna; "and I do really and truly want to be good, but—I don't know how."

"What *is* 'personal love to Christ,' mother?" questioned Susie, thoughtfully.

"My darling child, it is God's gift," Mrs. Keith replied.

"But is it for *us?* How can *we* obtain it?"

"On your knees, my child, *ask* for it!" Mrs. Keith answered, earnestly.

"I don't believe it's for *me*," Edna said, sadly. "The more I pray, and the more I read the Bible, the worse I seem to grow. I thought when I was converted I should have nothing more to do, but keep growing better

day by day. But I am not improved in the least, and I am perfectly discouraged."

"Perhaps, dear Edna," Mrs. Keith said, gently, "you forget that Christ said, 'As the branch can not bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.' If I had known at your age, as I now know, what a priceless treasure, what 'a well of water springing up into everlasting life,' this personal, abiding love to Christ could be to a weak, sinful human soul, I would have sought it with untiring zeal. Whereas, all He required then, all He asks now, all He demands for the future, is sweet, unquestioning submission to His will. Alas! how few there are who learn this simple lesson:—that parallels can not form a cross. And that a will uniform with Christ's is the only secret of a glad, peaceful, useful Christian life. The reception of this divineness

opens a fountain in our souls ever springing into life. It comes to us in every homely duty, waits along the common paths of our common life, and presses itself into every hour, and every place; helping us in every endeavor to be true, and to be good—to become, and to achieve. If we possess this divineness —this oneness with Christ—then, and not till then, are we Christ-like; and 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.'"

Edna took long strides in her religious education as she listened; and then and there was born in her heart an eager determination to know more of the wonderful, yet simple, mystery. And straight to her room, from that quiet talk, went she, and locked her door; then she knelt beside her bed, and entered into solemn covenant with her Savior to dedicate her life, with all its imperfections and shortcomings, to his service. And the seed sown by Mrs. Keith's lavish hand was destined to yield a glorious fruitage.

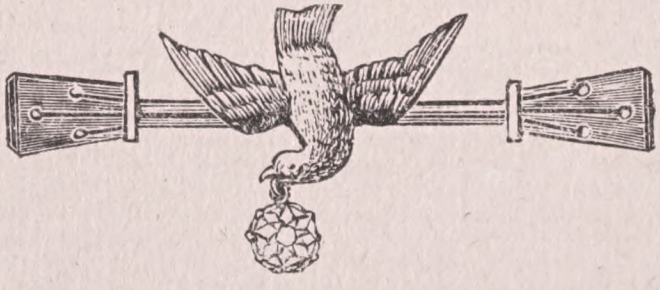
It was in June,—the freshest, rarest, most perfect month in the year,—when the roses were in bloom, and the sweet scent from flowering shrubs and trees filled the house with delicate perfume, that Dr. Gordon claimed his bride. Now, Susie would have preferred a quiet wedding, at her own home. But Dr. Gordon, in a measure, belonged to his people; and to many of them it would be a rare pleasure to witness the nuptial ceremony. So it came to pass, on that rare June day, that she walked down the church aisle in her sheeny bridal robes, leaning on her husband's arm—Mrs. Dr. Gordon. With the opening words of the ceremony her eyes had deepened and darkened into the glad solemnity of one who treads upon holy ground. There was no sign of embarrassment in the sweet face, no tremor of foreboding—but the outshining from her soul of love-full content. Mr. Adams, the aged minister who had baptized Dr. Gordon in his infancy, received him into the church, and assist-

ed at his ordination, officiated; and there was a sincere ring to his kind voice when he said, a little later,—

"Mrs. Gordon, I am glad my young brother has so wisely chosen his helpmeet."

A rare glow overspread Susie's face at the words, and her heart gave a little, exultant bound when she thought that she was indeed Dr. Gordon's chosen companion, and helper.

Ah, the sacred union of two lives means more than a kiss here, a caress there. It means to walk together side by side,—to *help* one another, "to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."



CHAPTER XXIX.

"HOW perfectly beautiful!"

The universal voice said this, when, a year later, another bridal *cortege* wended its way slowly up the broad aisle, to the altar.

"Wilt thou take this woman to be thy wedded wife, to live together, after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

It was Dr. Gordon's voice that asked these questions. And Dr. Keith's voice, firm and clear, responded:

"I will."

And a moment later, Edna heard—like one

in a blissful dream—the concluding words of the impressive marriage ceremony.

"After these vows, thus solemnly made by you both in the presence of God, and these witnesses, I pronounce you husband and wife, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

And the next morning's papers announced that Dr. and Mrs. Keith, accompanied by Dr. and Mrs. Gordon, would pass the honeymoon in Europe. So it came to pass, the books of the *Europea*, on which Elmer Worthington had engaged passage for himself and bride, now bore the names of the happy bridal party. In due time they reached Antwerp, and Susie's wish was gratified, for at last she stood before Rubens' wonderful masterpiece, "The Descent from the Cross."

"Oh, see His hands!" she cried, breathlessly.

"And His feet!" said Edna. "How could they wound Him so?"

And Dr. Gordon's voice added, softly:

"'See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?'"

But now their attention was arrested by the sound of a very loud whisper just behind them.

"I'll be hanged! said the voice; "if there isn't Edna Byford!"

"Why, the small-pox didn't disfigure her at all!" said another voice.

"Disfigure her? I should say not! Why, I never saw her so beautiful as she is this blessed minute."

"Humph!" was the answer given to this declaration, and then our party turned to confront Mr. Worthington.

"Why, Miss Byford,—" he began.

"Allow me to introduce you to my wife—Mrs. Keith," interrupted the Doctor, with a wicked little smile.

Mr. Worthington held out his hand with the easy, nonchalant air of one who is accustomed to popularity.

"Upon my word," he said, "this *is* a surprise! By the way, Mrs. Keith, my wife is an old friend of yours. Mabel," turning suddenly round, "You havn't forgotten Edna Byford, have you?"

"What a delightful surprise this is," murmured Mrs. Worthington.

"And we should have missed it, if you hadn't coaxed me to come and see this horribly doleful picture," added Mr. Worthington. "I suppose it's the thing, though, to do the famous paintings when one's abroad, so one can tell the folks at home about them, you know."

Edna's great, thoughtful eyes scanned the man before her, and she almost shuddered at the sight of his face, that told of a life worse than wasted. "Is it *possible* that I ever promised to marry him?" she asked herself. "What a life we *should* have led! Oh, how

good God was to lead me in my blindness, 'by a way that I knew not,' into this light, and joy, and peace!"

Now, all this happened twenty-five years ago; and the other evening Dr. and Mrs. Keith celebrated their silver wedding. It was before Mrs. Keith descended to meet her guests, that she stood for a moment before a light stand, on which her open Bible rested. Presently her husband came up beside her and slowly turned the leaves; then he pointed to these words: "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. She will do him good, and not evil, all the days of her life."

There was ineffable love, and joy, and trust, in the eyes she raised to his.

"O, Nelson, do you *really* think so?" she said, softly.

For all answer he folded her in his arms, and kissed her tenderly.

Ah, love is the *life* of life!—God's best, most precious gift to man. And a home united by

this sacred bond typifies and foreshadows the home that is perfect, and eternal.

"I have been thinking," Edna said, presently, "how true this verse is: 'And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.'"

And Dr. Keith answered, reverently: "'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters.'"

Ah! the *Father's* hand had led them. That was the glad secret of their happy marriage—crowning their lives with richness. Leaning on His strong arm, they had stood beside their dead, and looked their last look upon dear, coffined faces. Clinging to His upholding hand, they had gazed down into open graves; but even into that awful gloom a Savior's love can penetrate, and straightway their be-

wildered eyes had seen through the dark portal the bright gleam of "heaven's distant lamps." So the glorious moonlight—on that twenty-fifth anniversary—folded its silvery mantle about three marble slabs, the latest of which bore the inscription: "Susie, beloved daughter of Nelson and Edna Keith; aged 19 years. Not lost, but gone before." Nineteen beautiful years they had been, filled to repletion with sweet, girlish loving-kindness, that left a joy in the mother's heart, even amid its deepest pain. So, "being dead," their daughter still lived—a blessed memory.

Among the guests that evening were Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Byford. But you would never have recognized the Charlie of our early chapters in the Rev. Mr. Byford of that evening. With him it had been no sudden transformation, but a gradual "following on to know the Lord." And through a blessed eternity he would thank Dr. Keith for the kind words spoken, the helping hand extended, in his

hour of need. By his side—"a noble woman, nobly planned"—stood Ella Faircourt, his wife. The kind heart of her girlhood had proved *good* ground, and in homes where want and sickness and sorrow abounded, her name was a household word. Dr. and Mrs. Gordon also were present, and back over the years that had gone went his thoughts, as he stood, resting one arm on the mantel, and surveyed the scene. And just here comes the absurd wish that I were able to sketch that group for you,—I should so like to show how the beauty of holiness outlives the dimpled roundness of youth. Ah, many are the cosmetics, and hair restoratives, and "blooms of youth," warranted to beautify the human face; but one touch of the Great Artist's hand can give a *genuine*, glorious loveliness, that time can never fade.

Presently there came a lull in the conversation; then Dr. Keith led his wife to the piano. You have never heard her sing? Then how

can I make clear to you how her splendid voice rolled out in the beautiful words:

"'When on my day of life the night is falling,
And, in the winds from unsunned spaces blown,
I hear far voices out of darkness calling
My feet to paths unknown,—

"'Thou, who hast made my home of life so pleasant,
Leave not its tenant, when its walls decay;
O Love divine, O Helper ever-present,
Be Thou my strength and stay!

"'Be near me when all else is from me drifting,—
Earth, sky, home's pictures, days of shade and shine,—
And kindly faces to my own uplifting
The love which answers mine.

"'I have but Thee, O Father! Let Thy Spirit
Be with me then, to comfort and uphold;
No gate of pearl, no branch of palm, I merit,
Nor street of shining gold.

"'Suffice it, if—my good and ill unreckoned,
And both forgiven through Thy abounding grace—
I find myself, by hands familiar, beckoned
Unto my fitting place.

"'There, from the music round about me stealing,
I fain would learn the new and holy song;
And find, at last, beneath Thy trees of healing,
The life for which I long.'"

Never were tender words more tenderly sung! And Nelson Keith—standing in the same position that he stood on the night of Mrs. Tremain's party, years before—looked down into the lovely, peaceful face before him, with a feeling of thankful, exultant joy.

"So the Lord alone did lead them, and there was no strange God with them."

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